

## Tests

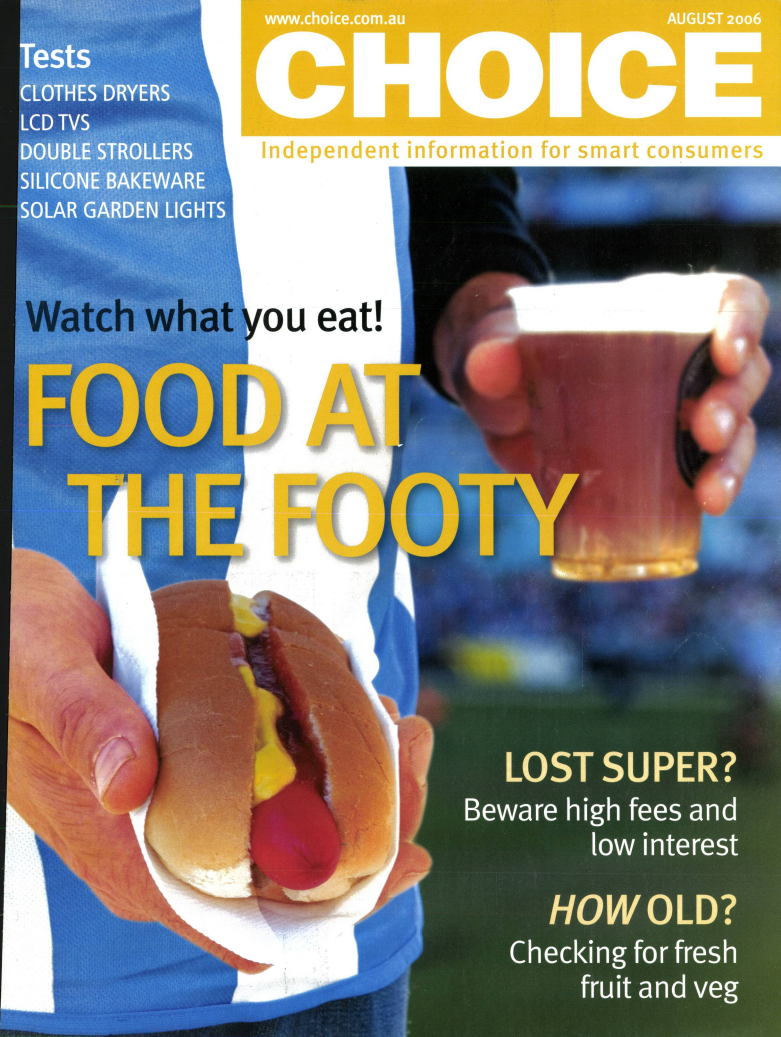
CLOTHES DRYERS  
LCD TVS  
DOUBLE STROLLERS  
SILICONE BAKEWARE  
SOLAR GARDEN LIGHTS

# CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Watch what you eat!

## FOOD AT THE FOOTY

A person wearing a blue and white striped shirt is holding a hot dog in a bun with mustard and a red tomato slice. They are also holding a large glass of beer with a thick head of foam. The background is a blurred stadium setting.

### LOST SUPER?

Beware high fees and  
low interest

### HOW OLD?

Checking for fresh  
fruit and veg

## COMING SOON ...

### Line trimmers

Keeping your lawn edges trim.



### Window cleaners

Checking for smears, streaks and how much elbow grease you have to use.



### Washing machines

A couple of new top performers, both large and small.



#### Subscribe to CHOICE

PERSONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

One year \$74, two years \$137.

COMPANIES/INSTITUTIONS

One year \$118, two years \$225.

For subscription and renewal enquiries only, call 1800 069 552.

#### CONTACT US

WRITE to us at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.

PHONE us on (02) 9577 3399.

FAX us on (02) 9577 3377.

EMAIL us at [ausconsumer@choice.com.au](mailto:ausconsumer@choice.com.au)

## Find that lost super!

If you changed jobs at some stage and didn't get around to transferring the money from your old super fund into the new one, you could be one of many thousands of Australians with some 'lost' super. There have been various campaigns in recent years encouraging us all to reclaim this money — about \$5 billion worth altogether — but many of us probably haven't felt a sense of urgency about doing it. After all, it's still sitting safely in our old super funds, isn't it?

I was surprised to find out in this issue of CHOICE that in fact, no, a lot of it isn't. If no contributions have gone into the account for two years or more to the fund member has been returned undelivered (chances are you didn't tell them about any change of address either), your super, especially if it's a small amount, can be regarded as having joined the vast ranks of the 'lost'.

At this point your super fund may transfer your money into a different account in what's called an eligible rollover fund (ERF). The idea of these funds is to protect small super amounts from being eaten away by high fees: in an ERF your admin costs aren't usually allowed to exceed your investment earnings. However, as our article on page 12 discovered, there are ERFs and there are ERFs.

While some keep their fees reasonable and provide decent investment returns, others don't. We found ERFs that returned 0% (or a fraction more) earnings on small balances over several years, or that charged extremely high fees. Some ERFs aren't even in the White Pages and don't have a website — what chance does a lost super owner have of finding out how their fund's performing or transferring their money to a more suitable account? And as long as you don't, they carry on raking in the fees.

The message is clear: find your lost super now — see page 15 for what to do.



Jane Mackenzie  
Editor

### [www.CHOICEextra.com.au](http://www.CHOICEextra.com.au)



This is a free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers. It's an index of CHOICE articles going back to Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs of many of them so you can read them immediately, without having to go and find your issue of CHOICE.

To use this website you need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the number directly above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

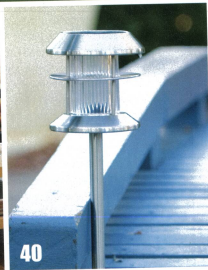
If you see the  symbol in a magazine article it means there's extra information on [choiceextra](http://choiceextra.com.au) that we couldn't fit into the magazine.



## Call 1300 360 655

All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only, and you can use it to buy major laundry, kitchen and home entertainment appliances, cameras and computers (all costing over \$100) and cars (over \$10,000).





## CHOICE PRICE RISE

Due to increasing costs, the price of a CHOICE subscription is going up. The new prices, effective from this issue, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly \$18.50, one year \$74, two years \$137.
- Institution/company: one year \$118, two years \$225.
- CHOICE and CHOICE Online: quarterly \$29.
- Upgrade to CHOICE plus CHOICE Online if you're already a CHOICE subscriber: \$10.50/qtr.
- If you've subscribed to CHOICE magazine within the last year, the price you pay will be held constant for your first year.

## CONTENTS

August 2006

### COVER STORY

#### 9 A sporting chance?

Buying food at sports venues can be a bit of a gastronomic gamble.

*Photo: Gene Ross*

### REPORTS

#### 12 Super stitch-up

Some funds for lost super charge excessive fees and pay 0% interest.

#### 16 Kitchen benchtops

Pros and cons of granite, marble, stainless steel and more.

#### 28 Converging in the lounge room

Controlling all your home entertainment products — and your computer — from one box.

### TESTS

#### 20 'Fresh' fruit and veg?

Why we're sometimes disappointed with the quality of fresh produce.

#### 24 81 cm LCD TVs

Big variations in picture and sound quality.

#### 31 Bendy bakeware

Silicone bakeware's foldable, rollable and easy to get your baking out of. How well does it cook?

#### 35 Double strollers

The answer to the prayers of parents with twins or a toddler and baby? Well ... maybe.

#### 40 How does your garden glow?

Not very brightly (or for very long) with most of these solar-powered lights.

#### 43 Clothes dryers

New models from major brands.

### REGULARS

- 4 CHOICE Cuts
- 7 Your Letters
- 8 Hip Pocket: High credit card fees, illegal super early-release schemes.
- 34 Food Bites: Plan to combat obesity, comparing apples and oranges.
- 42 Computing CHOICE: Maths tuition software.
- 48 Consumer Bookshelf
- 49 Recalls and bans
- 51 CHOICE index: September 2005 to August 2006
- 52 The Hard Word

## To lock or not to lock?

If you've travelled to the USA over the past few years you may have had the unpleasant experience of having your luggage locks broken by US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officials while checking your bags.

But it's still possible to safely lock your luggage when travelling to the US, provided you use a TSA-recognised locking system. TSA screeners are able to open these locks using special tools and relock them after inspection without damaging them.

You need to buy a lock with a 'Travel Sentry' or 'Safe Skies' logo (see below). We've heard of other companies claiming to be TSA-approved, but these are the only two locking systems officially recognised by the TSA. The logo should be on the lock itself so that baggage screeners can see it's an approved lock.

You can buy Safe Skies locks online at [www.safeskielocks.com](http://www.safeskielocks.com). There's free international shipping for all orders over US\$14.99, with single locks ranging in price from US\$4.95 to \$14.99 (around A\$6.45-\$19). Look for Travel Sentry locks in luggage stores throughout Australia.



Travel Sentry



Safe Skies

## Fat chance

Imagine an exercise machine that turns your wobbly bits into something taut and terrific while you do nothing more strenuous than sit on the couch. Imagine no sweaty workouts at the gym or guilt over not exercising. Sounds like a dream, doesn't it? Well, the bad news is that it's just that.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has had a win in the Federal Court in Perth against Slendertone Health and Beauty Pty Ltd and Emerald Ocean Distributors Pty Ltd, which claimed their Slendertone Health and Beauty electronic muscle-stimulating gadget would tone and firm any part of the body with no effort from the user, as well as eliminating cellulite and flattening the stomach.

The court, headed by Justice Nicholson, found the evidence established that Slendertone EMS products didn't reduce body fat and that it was misleading to speak of these products as having the ability to tone the body. The court also found the company in question had engaged in false and deceptive conduct when promoting the Slendertone products.

Chairman of the ACCC, Graeme Samuel, says of the win, "Consumers deserve to be fully informed when making purchasing decisions in this area. The ACCC has achieved a number of substantial outcomes in this area over the past few years, including this judgment. These have included the advertising or promotion of impotency cures, weight-loss cures, hair removal claims, laser eye surgery and 'miracle cures', including therapeutic 'ion mats'."

You knew it anyway: forget the gadgets and get active — the experts say the sensible way to lose excess body fat is by making healthy changes to your eating and exercise habits.

## Drinks: the health hierarchy

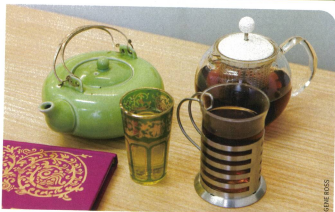
Tea pulls rank over soft drinks for health and nutrition, reports the July/August issue of *CHOICE Health Reader*. A team of US researchers reviewed the medical literature and rated various beverage categories according to their relative health and nutrition benefits and risks, in an attempt to provide guidance to consumers as to what to drink and what to avoid.

The study, published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, rated drinks from best to worst. While water topped the list of the non-alcoholic beverages, some of the tastier alternatives, in decreasing order of ranking, include black and green tea, then low-fat and skim milk and, further down the list, fruit juices and sports drinks. High-calorie soft drinks, usually sweetened by sucrose (or high-fructose corn syrup in the US), are at the bottom.

The message according to *Health Reader*: opt for water, tea or low-fat milk over fruit juice, sports drinks and particularly soft drinks.

Also in *July/August Health Reader*:

■ Australian researchers have found that eating chocolate had no significant effect on the behaviour of a sample of preschool children, despite the popular belief that it can cause children to become restless, inattentive, disobedient and even aggressive.



■ Researchers from Oregon in the US have reviewed existing evidence for the effectiveness of non-hormonal therapies for treating hot flushes in menopause. They found that Clonidine (an anti-hypertensive drug) and certain antidepressants will work, but they're not as effective as oestrogen and generally have more side effects. The evidence for isoflavone extract and other prescription medicines wasn't good enough to recommend them.

If you'd like to subscribe to *CHOICE Health Reader*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free, or go to [www.choice.com.au/magazines](http://www.choice.com.au/magazines).

## Scamster destroys dream of travelling the world

Kim, 35, dreams of travelling the world in retirement. "I'd been making huge personal contributions to my super as I believed this was the most secure and effective way of getting enough to retire early," she says.

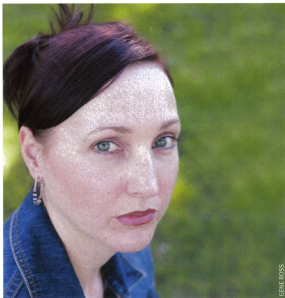
When Kim's fund didn't perform well a few years back she was attracted to an advertisement promoting self-managed super funds (SMSF). She contacted the promoter and her money was rolled over from her old fund into her own SMSF. She received regular statements showing fantastic returns.

"Imagine my surprise when an investigator turned up at my home with the bank statements for my fund, showing how the money had gone into the account but had been withdrawn in hundred-dollar amounts at the local casino. Only \$550 of my \$30,000 superannuation balance was left," says Kim.

The promoter had a gambling problem and was using an illegal scheme to trick his victims out of their super money. See *Hip Pocket*, page 8, for more on this.

To help protect yourself from scamsters make sure anyone offering a financial service to you has an Australian Financial Services Licence (AFSL) or is an authorised representative of a licence holder. To check call ASIC on 1300 300 630.

If you're thinking about investing in an SMSF consider first whether you have the money and skills to do this. You generally need around \$200,000 in super to make it worthwhile and it typically costs around \$3500 in annual fees and running costs. You also have to be a trustee of your own fund. While you can get professional help with managing it, you remain legally responsible. For example, you have to ensure the fund meets all its reporting requirements. For more information contact the ATO on 13 10 20 or [www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au).



## Staying informed about medicines

The debate about how best to provide consumers with accurate and helpful information about their medications continues. Three years after the launch of Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets, research shows that only 27% of people recall reading a CMI with their last new medication.

The leaflets were designed to inform consumers about their prescription and pharmacy-only medication in an easy-to-read format. CMIs include, among other things, information about what the medicine is used for and how it works; any interaction it might have with food or other medicines; side effects; and what to do in the case of an overdose.

They're sometimes included as a package insert with the medication, but many drug companies are phasing this out, as any change to the CMI may mean the product has to be recalled. Instead, pharmacists are increasingly being relied upon to provide the CMIs, but many have expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the detailed leaflets. They say they often leave patients confused and over-concerned about unlikely side effects.

Doubts or not, under the latest Community Pharmacy Agreement that started in December 2005, pharmacists are now paid to provide CMIs as part of their increased dispensing fee. Previously pharmacists who gave out CMIs had to claim their fee of 10 cents per subsidised prescription from the Health Insurance Commission every two months. Now all pharmacists will get it automatically and many, including the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, think this means pharmacists are under an obligation to hand out the CMIs according to the guidelines.

Meanwhile the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is considering ways to improve consumer access to CMIs. In April last year it floated suggestions, such as setting up a comprehensive and regularly updated database of CMIs on its website. After calling for submissions from interested parties, the cogs have turned rather slowly and its recommendations, due out in August last year, have yet to appear. We'll keep you informed.

When should you be offered a CMI?

- If you ask your pharmacist or doctor for it.
- The first time you buy a medicine.
- If you change the form of your medication (such as from injection to tablet).
- If there's been a significant change in the CMI.
- At regular intervals (such as every six months) if you're taking the medication long-term.

## Baby walker safety standard

There are plenty of compelling reasons not to use a baby walker, and CHOICE doesn't recommend them (for more on why, see right). However, if you do have one for your baby, make sure it's as safe as possible.

Baby walkers must pass a product safety standard, introduced in 2002, that ensures the walker is unlikely to tip over or fall down stairs. The ACCC recently issued a product safety guide to remind manufacturers, suppliers and consumers of this standard, which is based on a US standard, ASTM F977-00.

If you buy a baby walker, check that it's stable and strong, has no sharp edges, and has a safety device to help stop it falling down stairs (such as a braking mechanism that engages when one wheel goes over an edge).

Baby walkers should also have clear labels with warnings to:

- Always keep your child in view and never leave them unattended while in the walker.
- Block off any stairs before using the walker.

- Only use the walker on flat surfaces.
- Keep hot liquids, heaters and other dangerous items out of reach of your child in the walker.

So what are the problems with baby walkers?

- They make a baby mobile earlier than normal and can allow them access to dangerous objects and places that would normally be out of reach.
- Some studies have shown walkers can delay developmental milestones like crawling, standing and walking.
- Walkers prop babies up in an unnatural walking posture, and because they can't see their feet, they don't get the visual feedback that's important for learning to walk.

- Baby walkers can also lead to children becoming habitual toe walkers, which can require therapy to correct.

CHOICE isn't alone: the Australian Physiotherapy Association discourages the use of baby walkers, and some government authorities, both here and overseas, have called for baby walkers to be banned.

### UPDATE

#### LAYBACK STROLLERS

CHOICE, May 2006

We identified a safety hazard for the IGC Buzzy Days 316-BD four-wheel layback stroller. The removable front bar can be fitted in two different positions; in one (incorrect) orientation, the gap between the front bar and the seat isn't big enough, posing a risk that an unsecured child could slip down and get their head trapped.

IGC tells us this problem has been fixed for future shipments of this stroller, by adding a keying arrangement to the front bar/frame connectors. This ensures the bar can only be fitted in the correct orientation, in which there's no head trap hazard. If you decide to buy this stroller, make sure you get the updated model.



## WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

### KEEPING OLDER CHILDREN SAFE

When we think of children's safety, potential dangers for babies readily spring to mind, such as curly and blind cords that can spell disaster for children in nearby cots. But older children too are at risk from unsafe products.

For example, last year the European Standard for Cords on Children's Clothes banned the use of cords and drawstrings in the head and neck areas of clothing for children up to the age of seven, reports *Consumer Choice* in Ireland. In similar clothing for seven to 14-year-olds their use is restricted.

And when researching school backpacks we came across alarming statistics from Germany, where a child is involved in a road accident every 11 minutes. *Test* magazine reports that a strict German industry standard requires school backpacks to have brightly coloured retro-reflective and fluorescent materials, preferably in orange-red or yellow, on the front and sides, to make kids more visible on the roads, especially during the dark winter months.

### PSYCHIC POWER FAILURE

As part of our UK sister organisation's research into scams, the editor of *Which?* magazine took part, a year or so ago, in a dodgy-looking competition to see how it worked. "My address was clearly sold on, as now I'm inundated with offers of ridiculous-sounding lotteries," he says. "Even the local psychic seems to be targeting me. Clearly her powers aren't up to much. Shouldn't she realise that the editor of *Which?* isn't the ideal recipient for her badly spelt letters promising gold (so long as I send her some money first)?"

### SHOE SHOPPING FOR KIDS

You probably knew all along that you can't rely on the size alone to find a pair of shoes that fits your youngster. In Austria *Konsument* magazine found that only every fourth pair of kids' shoes it tested had the correct measurements for the respective size. When you buy your child new shoes, make sure they try them on (with the kind of socks they're likely to wear), *Konsument* advises, and go shoe shopping in the afternoon, as feet tend to get bigger and broader during the course of the day.



# yourletters

## NO FREEBIES

My husband and I went to a restaurant in Cronulla (NSW) today for lunch. Our meal was lovely and the service was good too. But what irks me is the fact that we had two glasses of water placed on our table without requesting them. We thought it was very nice. When our bill arrived we had been charged \$4 per glass — can they do this lawfully?

Mary McCoubrey

*We're pleased to report this story had a happy ending. Mary told us she rang the restaurant a few days later to complain to the manager and he was very apologetic. He said a mistake had been made, the restaurant did not charge for tap water and offered to reimburse her.*

*The Restaurant and Catering Association NSW/ACT said it was surprised by this story and, while there are no set guidelines, it would discourage restaurants from engaging in this conduct. "In a competitive environment, service is one of the best ways to differentiate your restaurant. This is poor service," said a spokesman.*

*Whether you're entitled to be given a free glass of tap water in a licensed venue, including restaurants, pubs and clubs, depends on which state or territory you're in. For example in NSW, WA and the ACT*



*it's mandatory to provide free drinking water in all licensed venues. In Queensland water must be available free or at a "reasonable price" (it should cost no more than a glass of soft drink); and in SA, Tasmania and Victoria there are voluntary guidelines encouraging the provision of free or low-cost water. In the NT all late-night trading premises (such as nightclubs) must provide free tap water.*

## COSTLY TYPO

I work in Queensland and three times a year I get to fly my 15-year-old son up for a visit. I recently booked with JETSTAR for the first time. When I was booking online I accidentally entered my name in the passenger details section instead of my son's. When I rang JETSTAR to fix it I was told it would cost me \$144 to make the change.

I asked why and the call centre operator said that the fare had to be rebooked at current rates, plus a \$40 charge for each flight (there and back). They told me the charges were listed under the starred section on the agreements page. But I couldn't find it listed in the terms. You actually have to type in another address to find the list of charges.

So in the end I had to pay another \$144 for a flight that I'd already booked, simply to change the first name on the ticket. I think it's an absolute rant.

Dale Brooker

*JETSTAR says the rules and costs associated with making a change to a JetSaver ticket (the lowest fare on a particular route) are made easily available for customers a number of times during the online booking process and, before the transaction can take place, a customer must indicate they have read the fare conditions.*

*Although not required by its fare conditions, JETSTAR says it does waive the change fee and fare difference when a customer has made a legitimate mistake when entering the passenger's name and has rung the call centre within 24 hours of the error taking*

## THUMBS UP!



■ **Gaye-Maree, of Altona Meadows,**

Victoria, awards a 'Thumbs up' to ENJO. When the head of her mop broke, the local dealer organised free postage to return it for repair and the loan of another mop while she waited, even though it was over two years out of warranty. Two weeks later she received a replacement mop head free of charge with an additional 12-month warranty.

■ **When BEDSHED in Townsville, Queensland,** delivered Robert's new bed he realised part of the order was missing. He went to pick up the missing part and the store threw in two pillows free for the inconvenience it had caused him.

*place. In this case Dale didn't realise his mistake until a couple of weeks after booking.*

## PACK YOUR PRINTOUT

I would like to offer some advice about renting cars when travelling. We visited Canada recently and before travelling I made an online booking with a car rental company. I received an online confirmation for the booking which I printed and took with us on holiday.

When it came time to settle the account I was told there would be an excess charge for mileage exceeding 200 kilometres per day. Luckily I was able to produce my email confirmation which clearly stated there was no mileage limitation/excess.

My point is, if you make holiday bookings online you can save a lot of hassle by printing out the confirmation and taking it with you.

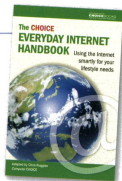
Name withheld

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Mary McCoubrey, receives *The CHOICE Everyday Internet Handbook* or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, page 48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



## Early-release super schemes

Schemes promoting early access to superannuation money have got both consumers and the scheme promoters into hot water.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) has issued warnings about unscrupulous promoters who offer consumers illegal access to their super before retirement age. They tell your fund you want to transfer your money into another fund, which is legal, not that you want to take it out altogether, which isn't.

These schemes exist in a number of variations. For example:

- Promoters encourage you to set up a self-managed super fund (SMSF), saying you can use the money as you wish. They help you transfer your super savings into the SMSF and take high fees out of the money.
- The scamsters falsely tell your current fund that you're rolling over your super savings into another fund. They then intercept the cheque and retain high fees before transferring the balance to you.

### THE CATCH

Even with the high fees charged the schemes may seem appealing if you'd like to get hold of your super money, but in fact early access to your super is only possible under certain strict conditions.

Generally, your super money can't be withdrawn until your 'preservation' age (55 if you were born before 1 July 1960, going up gradually to 60 for people born after 30 June 1964). Preserved money can't be taken from your account without meeting specific conditions of release. Accessing your super early can get you into trouble with ASIC, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA).

You're only eligible to access your super prior to your preservation age in four situations: cases of 'severe financial hardship'; a temporary resident permanently leaving the country (not New Zealand citizens); permanent incapacity; or restricted 'compassionate grounds' — for example, paying for medical treatment. In each case, the decision to release your super before preservation age is made by the trustee of your fund and/or APRA.

Taking your super early for legitimate reasons is free, but requires you to apply to both APRA and your super fund. You can download the relevant forms at [www.apra.gov.au](http://www.apra.gov.au).

If you get your super illegally, you can incur fines and be assessed for tax on the full amount of the benefit, without any of the concessions normally available with legitimate super payouts. Paying tax as well as the fees to the scamster could end up costing more than you received from your super savings. For more information go to [www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au) or phone the ATO on 13 10 20.



## UK consumers pay hundreds of millions in illegal card fees

Credit card default charges, such as penalties for late payment of a monthly card bill, have generally been set "at a significantly higher level than is legally fair", according to a report by the UK's Office of Fair Trading (OFT). The OFT estimates that this has led to illegal penalty charges in excess of £300 million (over \$700 million) each year, and has told UK card companies that default charges above £12 (around \$29) will now be presumed unfair. The OFT's opinion has yet to be tested in court.

Of course, the OFT's findings have no legal bearing on what happens in Australia, but the analogy is interesting. Here, penalties for late credit card payments generally range from \$15 to \$35 (see the table for examples). Some of these fees have crept up recently — for example, in May ST GEORGE BANK added \$10 to its late payment and over-limit fees (now \$35 and \$30 respectively). The Australian Bankers' Association (ABA) didn't comment on the UK's findings when we contacted them.

Make sure you know how your card provider applies these penalties, and try to avoid them. If you've been slugged with unfair credit card fees or interest, we'd like to hear from you — send an email to [money@choice.com.au](mailto:money@choice.com.au).

### CREDIT CARD PENALTIES / DEFAULT CHARGES

| Banks                  | Late payment fee (\$)* | Over-limit fee (\$)* |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| ANZ                    | 35                     | 35                   |
| BENDIGO                | 15                     | 27.50                |
| COMMONWEALTH           | 25                     | 25                   |
| NATIONAL AUSTRALIA     | 30                     | 25                   |
| ST GEORGE              | 35                     | 30                   |
| WESTPAC                | 35                     | 35                   |
| Credit unions          |                        |                      |
| AUSTRALIAN CENTRAL     | 15                     | 40                   |
| CREDIT UNION AUSTRALIA | 15                     | 20                   |
| ENCOMPASS              | 25                     | 10                   |
| SAVINGS AND LOANS      | 35                     | Nil                  |
| Other card providers   |                        |                      |
| AUSSIE                 | 35                     | 35                   |
| GE MONEY / WIZARD      | 30                     | 20                   |
| VIRGIN                 | 25                     | 30                   |

\* Conditions for charging these fees are different for each account, depending on, for example, how late the payment is or how much over the limit you are.





# A sporting chance

Can eating at a sports venue be a gastronomic gamble?

Each year millions of Australians head to stadiums, tracks and racecourses to take part in the national pastime of watching sport. And whether you're there for just a few hours to watch the footy or all day for the cricket or horse racing, queuing up for food and drink is almost an obligatory part of the experience.

Recently there's been some debate about the quality and choice of foods available at sports venues. Is the food safe to eat? Are your choices limited to burgers, chips and little else? Are they charging too much? Given that at most venues you're a captive audience, we thought it was worth looking into.

We bought a total of 84 foods from stalls and kiosks in general admission areas of six different sporting venues — three in Victoria, two in NSW, one in Queensland. Our experts chilled each sample immediately and took it to an accredited lab to test for bacteria that commonly cause problems (see *Food poisoning bugs 101*, page 10, for details). They also observed the hygiene and food handling practices and recorded the prices and choices of food sold at stalls they visited.

## SCOREBOARD

Reassuringly, most of the foods we tested were safe to eat, with all the big stadiums managing a clean bill of health. But samples from Eastern Creek International Raceway (two samples out of nine) and Flemington Race Course (three samples out of 15) contained levels of bacteria usually indicative of poor personal hygiene by food handlers (for example, not washing hands after toilet breaks) and/or bad food handling practices (such as holding food at inappropriate temperatures).

■ At Eastern Creek a beefburger we bought was contaminated with coagulase-positive staphylococci, and a hotdog had significant numbers of total bacteria.

■ Another beefburger, this time from Flemington Race Course, was contaminated with *E coli*, and the total number of bacteria it contained was high. And a chocolate éclair and a chicken sub from Flemington contained undesirable levels of bacteria overall.

We sent details of these problems to the relevant companies. The Australian Racing Drivers Club (ARDC), the leaseholder of Eastern Creek

## IN A NUTSHELL

■ We tested food from six major sporting venues and found worrying levels of bacteria in five of the 84 tested samples.

■ While the majority of food tested was safe to eat, the food handling practices at some venues need to improve if they want to avoid future problems.

■ Some venues have an extensive range of food to choose from. Others offer little variety, so if pie and chips aren't your thing you may want to take your own.



## Food poisoning bugs 101

We tested the food samples for the following bugs, commonly associated with food poisoning:

■ **Bacillus cereus** is particularly associated with poor temperature control of cooked rice dishes and other cereal-based foods. Can cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea.

■ **Clostridium perfringens** is associated with poor heating and slow cooling of food, including meat and vegetable dishes such as stews and pies. Can cause severe stomach upset.

■ **Coagulase-positive staphylococci** usually indicate poor hygiene by food handlers. The toxins they produce can cause severe stomach upsets.

■ **E coli** bacteria in food indicate poor hygiene (possibly faecal contamination) or inadequate temperature control.

■ **Listeria monocytogenes** can multiply even at refrigerator temperatures and can cause miscarriage.

■ **Salmonella** indicates inadequate cooking or cross-contamination between foods, and causes vomiting, diarrhoea and fever. It can be fatal for elderly or frail people and very young children.

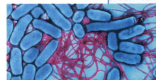
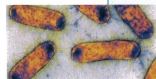
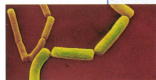
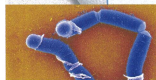
■ **Standard plate count** tells you the total of all bacteria present. A high number indicates poor cleaning or temperature control.

International Raceway, said that for some events, including the one we attended, it subcontracts food preparation and supply to a professional catering company. ARDC told us it will discuss our findings with the company and will be seeking assurances that the food quality and handling issues we highlighted are addressed.

Peter Rowland Catering, the company that operates the catering at Flemington Race Course, told us its subcontractors have strict food handling processes in place, and that its food has never before failed tests for microbiological safety. Since our investigation it's changed food distributors and says it's confident its food operation and practices are safe.

The individual foods from the other venues may have passed our tests, but at some there's still potential for problems. At the Gabba, for example, our experts observed uncovered food that could be touched (or sneezed on) by customers. And at the Telstra Dome staff at some stalls were handling food and then money without removing gloves in between.

Food temperature control is also an issue. Food poisoning bacteria thrive between 4°C and 60°C, so cold and hot food should be stored below or above these temperatures respectively. A number of foods we bought were well within the hazardous range, including a ham and salad sandwich that was 19°C and a (not so) hotdog that was just 33°C when we bought it. Not only are these foods a bacterial breeding ground in the making, the concept of a room-temperature sandwich or a tepid hotdog is also pretty offputting.



SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY



Venue, location, sporting event (number of foods tested), in alphabetical order

Eastern Creek International Raceway, Sydney, Barry Sheene Festival of Speed (9)

Flemington Race Course, Melbourne, Flemington Festival of Racing, Super Saturday (15)

MCG, Melbourne, AFL round 4, Collingwood v Essendon (15)

Telstra Dome, Melbourne, Cricket VB Series, Australia v South Africa (15)

Telstra Stadium, Sydney, NRL round 1, Wests Tigers v St George Illawarra (15)

The Gabba, Brisbane, AFL round 2, Brisbane Lions v Essendon (15)

#### 1 Food safety tests

| Pass | Warning | Fail  |
|------|---------|-------|
| 7    | 1 (A)   | 1 (A) |
| 12   | 1 (A)   | 2 (A) |
| 15   | 0       | 0     |
| 15   | 0       | 0     |
| 15   | 0       | 0     |
| 15   | 0       | 0     |

A high turnover of food may help keep problems at bay. But for stalls and kiosks where food is being held at inappropriate temperatures for extended periods of time, the potential for contamination to reach critical levels is of major concern.

*How to dodge a dodgy food vendor*, below right, gives tips to help you minimise your risk of food poisoning.

## FOOD CHOICE: A MIXED PLATTER

You can rely on meat pies, hotdogs, burgers and chips appearing on the menu at most venues. But not all sports fans are equally fond of the iconic pie and sauce, and certainly vegetarians would be happy to see a veggie option other than hot chips. So we were interested to see what was on offer at the venues we visited.

The MCG — not surprisingly, given the boost it would have received for the Commonwealth Games — appeared to offer the most choice, with more interesting options including chicken Caesar club sandwiches, lamb rogan josh curry and rice, souvlakis and zucchini tarts alongside the ubiquitous burgers, hotdogs and pies. For the health-conscious there were options including fruit salads and salads.

Eastern Creek, on the other hand, offered little to a motor head on a health kick. But if a sausage-on-a-stick and chips is your idea of a dream meal your needs would be well served.

For the most part, the food sold at sports venues appears to fall under the fast food heading, so if you're watching what you eat — or if you're vegetarian — your best bet is to pack your own.

## PRICE: PREPARE TO PAY

It's certainly convenient to buy your food at the venue. And for some, the ritual of a hotdog washed down with a beer is all part of the experience. But the costs can add up, particularly if you're buying for more than one person. A family of four, for

example, can pay around \$60 at the MCG for four burgers, four serves of chips, two beers and two juices. And that's without any snacks like chocolate or ice creams.

The prices at some venues appear to be comparable to what you might pay in your local takeaway shop. Others seem significantly more expensive, although the foods, portion sizes and ingredients may be different. Ultimately, though, there's no law governing what they're allowed to charge. And as you don't usually have the option of checking out a shop next door to see if it's cheaper, be prepared to pay the premium.

To save money, you could consider taking your own drinks and snacks — but you'll need to check with the venue first to see what you're allowed to take in.

## How to dodge a dodgy food vendor

Follow our tips to avoid the worst places and minimise your risk of food poisoning:

- Check that counters and surfaces are clean.
- Look out for staff with dirty hands or fingernails and long hair not tied back.
- Be wary of unrefrigerated prepacked sandwiches.
- Check that foods are cooked through — don't eat pink bits in the centre of hamburger meat or chicken.
- Check that staff are using different tongs for different types of food, such as salads and meat.
- If staff are wearing gloves, check that they change them frequently — for example, between handling raw and cooked food, and handling food and money. Dirty gloves are as bad as dirty hands.
- Steer clear of lukewarm foods that should be hot, and cold foods that aren't quite cold. If you're served some, don't just take the risk, take it back and complain.

## 1 Food safety tests

■ **Pass.** This indicates a good result, with an acceptably low level of bacteria.

■ **Warning.** Contains significant levels of bacteria, which may indicate possible hygiene problems in the preparation, storage or handling of the food.

■ **Fail.** High levels of bacteria. Levels this high are indicative of poor hygiene or food handling practices.

(A) See Scoreboard, pages 9–10, for the companies' responses to our findings.

# SUPER STITCH-UP

Some funds for 'lost' super charge excessive fees or even pay 0% returns. We tell you the worst offenders.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **'Lost' super** is often transferred into low-earning accounts called eligible rollover funds.
- **Both fees and returns** are often out of step with competitive super funds.
- **Tracking down** and transferring your money into a better account can give you lower fees and better returns (see What to do, page 15).

**S**witching your super seems like a bit of a hassle, doesn't it? But if you've changed job or address and forgotten to tell your fund, you may have some 'lost' super that's been transferred, without your knowledge, into a high-cost, low-performance fund.

They're called eligible rollover funds (ERFs) and most of the accounts in them have a small balance (the average isn't much more than \$1000), but there are over four million accounts worth over \$5 billion in total. ERFs were set up to provide 'member protection' for small, inactive and lost accounts, because the administration costs you pay usually can't exceed your investment returns. However, some are a poor option for your retirement savings, charging over the odds, providing low returns and using strategies that are unsuitable for long-term investments. Others provide better returns and charge more reasonable fees.

## HOW YOU COULD BE 'ERFED'

When a super account hasn't had contributions going in for two years or mail to the member has been returned undelivered, its owner could be considered 'lost' or the account inactive. The fund should report the member's details to the Australian

Taxation Office (ATO), which adds details to its Lost Members Register at [www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au). The fund may also decide to transfer the member's money to its preferred ERF. Small accounts (under \$1000) are also often transferred into ERFs in order to protect their balances from erosion by fees. However, there's inconsistency over when you could be ERFed; it's at the trustee's discretion and varies between funds.

If the money hasn't been claimed or transferred by the time the member turns 65, the money is transferred to the revenue office in the state where the fund's head office is located. Members can retrieve their money by contacting the relevant state revenue office.

## 0% RETURN

In the worst cases, ERFs are taking more in fees than they're crediting to members' accounts. Some give zero investment returns on small balances (yes, that's 0% at a time when the best online savings accounts pay around 6%, balanced super funds' one-year returns exceeded 20% and the best five-year returns were 10% per year).

Table 1 shows the big differences in returns (after fees) you might receive, depending on which ERF your money ends up in. The figures are for the

year ending 30 June 2005; we'll post 2006 rates when they're available in a free update at [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au).

For example, a \$500 account received 0% for each of the last three years and 0.6% pa over five years with AMP, one of the largest ERFs as measured by funds invested. AMP's fund is at least capital-guaranteed (your balance can't go backwards) and has no exit fees, unlike some ERFs that may give negative returns and charge up to \$50 on withdrawal. However, a 0% return is a high price to pay for this guarantee.

While returns improve for larger balances, other ERFs with poor recent returns for small accounts include ADVANCE (0.3% pa over five years to June 2005) and NATIONAL Preservation Trust (0.6% pa over three and five years).

ERFs often take a conservative investment approach, placing money in safe assets like deposits, bonds and fixed-interest investments to reduce the risk of negative returns.

However, even though ERFs were designed to be short-term holding accounts, many have become

## Proposed improvements

■ CHOICE thinks consumers would be better served by a centralised fund for small or lost balances, instead of having their money in relatively expensive ERFs.

■ A recent Parliament House of Representatives committee proposal for the government to introduce a 'default' super fund for casual employees is also a good idea.

■ The current Lost Members Register system has often failed to reunite lost members with their super, but the Federal Government wants to strengthen the ATO's role in this area. Under its proposals, the ATO would write to members advising them of their lost accounts and asking if they wish to consolidate them. A standard letter of instruction from the member would allow the ATO to process their request and consolidate the member's accounts. Super funds would have 30 days (after receiving the necessary paperwork) to comply with such requests, instead of the current 90.

Table 1. ERF crediting rates for account balances of \$500 / \$2000 / \$5000\*

| ERF name (in alphabetical order)               | 2005 (%)        | 2004 (%)        | 2003 (%)        | 2002 (%)        | 2001 (%)        | 3 years (% pa)  | 5 years (% pa)  |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>ADVANCE</b> Retirement Savings Account (A)  | 1.0 / 2.9 / 3.6 | 0.5 / 2.5 / 3.4 | 0.0 / 2.1 / 3.1 | 0.0 / 2.0 / 3.0 | 0.0 / 3.4 / 4.3 | 0.5 / 2.4 / 3.3 | 0.3 / 2.5 / 3.4 |
| <b>AMP</b> Eligible Rollover Fund / RSA (B)    | 0.0 / 2.7 / 3.7 | 0.0 / 2.1 / 3.1 | 0.0 / 2.1 / 3.1 | 0.5 / 2.9 / 3.6 | 2.6 / 4.6 / 4.6 | 0.0 / 2.3 / 3.3 | 0.6 / 2.9 / 3.6 |
| <b>AON</b> Eligible Rollover Fund              | 6.2             | 4.8             | 5.6             | na              | na              | 5.5             | na              |
| <b>AUSFUND</b>                                 | 12.0            | 13.0            | 3.5             | 1.5             | 8.0             | 9.4             | 7.5             |
| <b>AUSTRALIAN</b> Eligible Rollover Fund       | 9.8             | 8.7             | -3.8            | -5.9            | 3.3             | 4.7             | 2.2             |
| <b>ISPF</b> Eligible Rollover Fund             | 11.0            | 7.0             | 2.0             | na              | na              | 6.6             | na              |
| <b>NATIONAL</b> Preservation Trust (C)         | 1.9 / 4.7       | 0.0 / 3.0       | 0.0 / 1.2       | 0.0 / 1.9       | 1.3 / 3.7       | 0.6 / 3.0       | 0.6 / 2.9       |
| <b>NORWICH</b> Eligible Rollover Fund          | 2.4             | 1.5             | 1.3             | 2.5             | 3.0             | 1.7             | 2.1             |
| <b>PLAN B</b> Eligible Rollover Fund           | 2.5             | 2.3             | 1.9             | 1.7             | 2.8             | 2.3             | 2.2             |
| <b>PUBLIC</b> Eligible Rollover Fund           | 11.2            | 15.1            | -3.7            | -4.7            | 9.9             | 7.2             | 5.2             |
| <b>SMF / MELLON</b> Eligible Rollover Fund (D) | 5.7             | 6.3             | -4.6            | -8.6            | 3.0             | 2.3             | 0.2             |
| <b>SUPER</b> Eligible Rollover Fund            | 16.8            | 2.6             | 1.9             | 2.5             | na              | 6.9             | na              |
| <b>SUPER SAFEGUARD</b>                         | 8.1             | 6.6             | 2.1             | 2.9             | 3.2             | 5.6             | 4.6             |
| <b>SUPERTRACE</b> Eligible Rollover Fund       | 7.5             | 6.6             | 5.1             | -0.3            | 2.8             | 6.4             | 4.3             |

Returns to 30 June 2005. We show more than one rate if crediting rates differ depending on the account size. Rates are rounded to one decimal place.

Super Money Eligible Rollover Fund isn't in the table: it's a new fund, so historical crediting rates are not available.

\* Unless otherwise stated.

na Not available; fund may not have been in existence for long enough.

(A) Advance combines an ERF and retirement savings account. We show crediting rates for \$500, \$2000 and \$5000.

(B) AMP offers an ERF and a capital-guaranteed retirement savings account, which guarantees no negative returns.

(C) The first figure is the crediting rate for \$500 and \$2000, the second for \$5000.

(D) SMF acquired Mellon's ERF on 1 January 2005.

Investment performance before 2005 is for the Mellon ERF.

Source: SuperRatings, the ERFs and their product disclosure statements available in June 2006.

Table 2. Maximum fees as a percentage of account balances (%)

| ERF name                                   | Account balance (\$) |         |         |         |         |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                            | 500                  | 1000    | 2000    | 5000    | 50,000  |
| <b>ADVANCE</b> Retirement Savings Account  | 1.7                  | 1.7     | 1.7     | 1.7     | 1.7     |
| <b>AMP</b> Eligible Rollover Fund / RSA    | 2.1                  | 2.1     | 2.1     | 2.1     | 2.1     |
| <b>AON</b> Eligible Rollover Fund          | 2.4                  | 2.4     | 2.4     | 2.4     | 2.4     |
| <b>AUSFUND</b>                             | 2.4                  | 1.4     | 0.9     | 0.6     | 0.4     |
| <b>AUSTRALIAN</b> Eligible Rollover Fund   | 4.6                  | 2.8     | 1.9     | 1.4     | 1.1     |
| <b>ISPF</b> Eligible Rollover Fund         | 4.2                  | 2.7     | 2.0     | 1.6     | 1.3     |
| <b>NATIONAL</b> Preservation Trust         | 2.7                  | 2.7     | 2.1     | 1.3     | 0.8     |
| <b>NORWICH</b> Eligible Rollover Fund      | 5.0                  | 5.0     | 5.0     | 5.0     | 5.0     |
| <b>PLAN B</b> Eligible Rollover Fund       | 2.6                  | 2.6     | 2.6     | 2.6     | 2.6     |
| <b>PUBLIC</b> Eligible Rollover Fund       | 2.3 (A)              | 2.3 (A) | 2.3 (A) | 2.3 (A) | 2.3 (A) |
| <b>SMF / MELLON</b> Eligible Rollover Fund | 2.6                  | 2.6     | 2.6     | 2.6     | 2.6     |
| <b>SUPER</b> Eligible Rollover Fund        | 4.1                  | 4.1     | 4.1     | 4.1     | 4.1     |
| <b>SUPER MONEY</b> Eligible Rollover Fund  | 2.3                  | 1.4     | 0.9     | 0.6     | 0.5     |
| <b>SUPER SAFEGUARD</b>                     | 2.8                  | 2.0     | 1.6     | 1.4     | 1.2     |
| <b>SUPERTRACE</b> Eligible Rollover Fund   | 1.7                  | 1.7     | 1.7     | 1.7     | 1.7     |

Calculations by CHOICE based on data from SuperRatings and from ERFs and their most recent product disclosure statements, using the latest fee information available. Fees often change.

We calculated the maximum annual fees for these account balances and represent them as a percentage, rounded to one decimal place. Sometimes, a flat member fee (eg \$10 pa) and a percentage investment fee (eg 0.5% of investments) are applied, so the overall percentage may vary for different account balances. Depending on investment performance, the full percentage fee shown may not always be applied, particularly for small accounts.

(A) 2.29% plus up to \$52 annual administration fee, which may not be applied in full, depending on investment performance and member protection rules.

*de facto* medium- to long-term investments because of an inability to locate their owners, or because owners don't transfer their money out. **AUSFUND**, for example, says the average member has been in its ERF for five years; other funds mentioned three-year averages. **AUSFUND** is an example of an ERF that takes a longer-term view by investing in assets like shares; strong stockmarket performance in recent years means such ERFs have outperformed conservative funds, but there's no guarantee that this will continue.

## SUPER FEE-FOR-ALL

Considering the investment style is often relatively low-cost and low-risk, the fees for some of these funds aren't low.

Annual fees, sometimes 4% to 5% of members' balances (and potentially more if maximum admin fees are applied), can be excessive when compared with competitive funds (industry funds' annual management costs are often less than 1%). Fees vary widely, as Table 2 shows for various fund balances.

Some ERFs argue that their fees don't look so bad when expressed as a dollar amount (instead of a percentage), particularly for small accounts, which make up the majority. For example, **NORWICH** ERF's maximum fee is 5%; applying this to the fund's average account size of around \$1200 gives an annual fee of \$60. But this doesn't stack up well against other ERFs, which would charge, for example, \$19.80 (**SUPERTRACE**) and \$14.30 (**AUSFUND**) for the same balance, while also providing much higher returns after fees over the past three and five years.

When you consider there are millions of ERF accounts worth billions of dollars, it's clear that this is a lucrative industry. It's estimated that ERFs rake in around \$100 million in fees from investors annually (a proportion of which is passed on to third parties like investment managers). A study by RiceWalker Consultants, commissioned by CHOICE, estimates that transferring ERFs into other super accounts would save consumers \$48 million in fees each year.

## LOST SUPER — OR FUNDS THAT ARE HARD TO FIND?

The Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority, which regulates super funds and trustees' responsibilities, lists 16 ERFs on its website. Most





Table 3. ERF contact details

|                                            | Postal address                            | Phone                        | Website               |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>ADVANCE</b> Retirement Savings Account  | GPO Box 887, Perth 6838                   | 1800 819 935                 | advance.com.au        |
| <b>AMP</b> Eligible Rollover Fund / RSA    | Locked Bag 5400, Parramatta 1741          | 1300 300 288                 | amp.com.au            |
| <b>AON</b> Eligible Rollover Fund          | GPO Box 9819, Sydney 2001                 | 1300 880 588                 | aon.com.au            |
| <b>AUSFUND</b>                             | PO Box 2468, Kent Town 5071               | 1300 361 798                 | unclaimedsuper.com.au |
| <b>AUSTRALIAN</b> Eligible Rollover Fund   | GPO Box 4171, Sydney 2001                 | 1800 631 600                 | perpetual.com.au      |
| <b>ISPF</b> Eligible Rollover Fund         | PO Box 1047, Milton 4064                  | (07) 3238 1296               | ispf.com.au           |
| <b>NATIONAL</b> Preservation Trust         | GPO Box 2163T, Melbourne 3001             | 1800 331 210                 | No website            |
| <b>NORWICH</b> Eligible Rollover Fund      | PO Box 2567W, Melbourne 3001              | 1800 814 899                 | navigator.com.au      |
| <b>PLAN B</b> Eligible Rollover Fund       | PO Box 7008, Cloisters Square, Perth 6850 | 1300 362 082, (08) 9324 6000 | planonline.com        |
| <b>PUBLIC</b> Eligible Rollover Fund       | PO Box 398, North Sydney 2059             | 1300 659 799                 | wealthpac.com.au      |
| <b>SMF / MELLON</b> Eligible Rollover Fund | GPO Box 529, Hobart 7001                  | 1800 677 306                 | smf.com.au            |
| <b>SUPER</b> Eligible Rollover Fund        | GPO Box 1623, Sydney 2001                 | (02) 9231 0117               | No website            |
| <b>SUPER MONEY</b> Eligible Rollover Fund  | Locked Bag 8840, Wollongong 2500          | 1800 114 380                 | smef.com.au           |
| <b>SUPER SAFEGUARD</b>                     | GPO Box 3426, Melbourne 3001              | 1300 13 5181                 | No website            |
| <b>SUPERTRACE</b> Eligible Rollover Fund   | Locked Bag 5429, Parramatta 2124          | 1300 788 750                 | supertrace.com.au     |

are in our comparison tables (including the top four, which account for over 85% of the money in this industry), but we had trouble tracking down **AUSTRALIAN CHOICE** and **SUPER Eligible Rollover Fund (SERF)** for copies of their product disclosure statements (PDS). These funds don't have websites, so we couldn't find them in the White Pages online, and they didn't respond for several weeks to letters sent to addresses given on the ATO's database. It made us wonder how difficult it must be for 'lost' members to find these funds.

Eventually, we discovered both ERFs share the same trustee (**TRUST COMPANY**), which said the **SERF** PDS is only provided to new members, and that the **AUSTRALIAN CHOICE** PDS is unavailable because the fund is being closed down, with members to be transferred to another ERF for which **TRUST COMPANY** is the trustee, **SUPER MONEY** Eligible Rollover Fund.

Other ERFs are more prominent and easily located; **AUSFUND**, for example, has an online search engine, runs advertising campaigns and sends letters to try to locate lost members, while **SUPERTRACE** says it's planning a matching exercise with customers of its parent company, **COMMONWEALTH BANK**.

In 2004 the Australian Securities and Investments Commission reported that most ERFs didn't make reasonable efforts to locate members before treating them as lost. With the number of ERF accounts having grown significantly since then, we wonder if several ERFs are still not trying hard enough to find lost members — and, in the meantime, continuing to charge fees and make profits on members' accounts. ■

## Have you received a letter like this?

In May Shirley received a letter from Australian Financial Recovery Services (AFRS), advising that it had located unclaimed money held on her behalf. The company said if Shirley signed an agent authorisation form and paperwork, including an Office of State Revenue (OSR) claim form, it could recover her money. The fee? 14% of the unclaimed sum.

"I verified by going to [www.osr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.osr.nsw.gov.au) that there is money in my name, some old super money from previous employment," Shirley says. "I claimed it for nothing directly from the OSR, not by using this company."

Several companies recover unclaimed money for a fee; others offer to locate lost super and roll it into their preferred super fund in return for a percentage commission from the new fund.

But there's no need to pay a fee to a company to recover your unclaimed funds. Do it yourself — it's easy and free (see *What to do*, below).



## WHAT TO DO

■ **Locate your lost super accounts:** [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au) has details of how to do it and provides links and contact details for all state and federal search services (go to [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au) and type 'lost super' in the search box). The Tax Office's SuperSeeker is on its website at [www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au).

■ **Get your money out of expensive, poorly performing ERFs:** You'll be much better off by consolidating all your super funds into one account, reducing the fees you pay. Contact the ERF to find out your account number and other details you'll need to switch. Before switching, check the pros and cons; for example, you might have to pay exit fees or lose insurance benefits when closing an old account.



Showing the way through  
the choice of kitchen  
benchtop materials.

# Raising the benchmark

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **Engineered stone** is a popular alternative to granite due to its range of colours, uniform appearance and durability — and it doesn't need to be resealed.
- **Fancy edges** can add flair to your benchtop, but will also add to the price.

**T**he kitchen is often described as the heart of the family home. No longer just a place for cooking and washing-up, it's become one of the key entertaining areas.

With all this activity, most people want their kitchen benchtops to look good, as well as being durable and easy to clean. Here's what you can expect from the most popular materials.

## GRANITE

Granite benchtops remain a favourite for those who want the elegant look of natural stone. Granite is one of the hardest materials available and, if cared for properly, can look good for many years.

It can withstand the heat from hot pans and it's very difficult to scratch with a knife, though cutting directly onto a granite benchtop will blunt your knives.

However, granite is a porous material that can absorb stains if it isn't resealed around once a year. Resealing is a relatively simple do-it-yourself process of cleaning and drying the benchtop, applying the sealant and leaving it to dry. Alternatively a stonemason can come and reseal it for you.

As it's a natural stone, granite can have 'veins' of different colours and patterns that vary across the slab. Therefore it's advisable to go to the fabricator's

workshop and choose the actual slab for your benchtop before it's installed, as it may look very different from the small sample in the showroom.

Granite is usually around the same price as engineered stone and slightly cheaper than solid surface, but much more expensive than laminate. (Actual prices vary from kitchen to kitchen; all we can do here is give you a sense of the comparative cost of the various materials.)

**Pros:** Can withstand hot pans; comes in beautiful colours; very durable; difficult to scratch.

**Cons:** Relatively expensive; needs to be resealed regularly; has joins; colours and patterns can differ from the showroom sample.

## ENGINEERED STONE

Engineered stone is a relatively new product in the benchtop market, but its appearance and durability have made it an extremely popular choice.

It's made of a composite of quartz or granite granules, marble dust or glass chips mixed with a resin or polyester base.

Engineered stone (which includes the brand names CaesarStone and SmartStone) has a number of advantages over its natural counterpart. It's almost totally non-porous, so it doesn't need to be sealed. It comes in a much larger variety of colours and

patterns than granite, including a range of lighter colours suited to the fashionable minimalist look. You can also be guaranteed uniformity of colour and pattern across the slab.

Like granite, it's very durable, can withstand hot pots and is very difficult to scratch, but it's still worth using a chopping board on this surface to avoid blunting your knives.

It's generally around the same price as granite, depending on the style you choose.

**Pros:** Doesn't have to be resealed; large variety of colours and patterns; can withstand hot pans; difficult to scratch.

**Cons:** More expensive than some other materials; uniform look isn't for everyone.

## MARBLE

There's a reason that marble counters are generally found in bathrooms rather than kitchens. While it may look classic and beautiful, marble lacks the durability of granite and has a tendency to stain and scratch. It's also sensitive to acidic foods and some cleaners. Marble requires a lot more maintenance and resealing than granite to keep it looking good.

Still, marble's smooth, cool finish makes it a favourite surface for rolling dough and making pastry, so you may want to put a marble inset into a benchtop of another material. The downside is this will create joints between the materials where dirt can be trapped.

Marble is usually more expensive than granite or engineered stone.

**Pros:** Good surface for rolling dough and making pastry; looks good.

**Cons:** Not scratch or stain-resistant; not as durable as granite; requires regular resealing.

## LAMINATE

Laminate is still a very popular option, especially for those on a budget. It's a synthetic material made up of several layers of printed paper bound with resin under high pressure and cut, shaped and glued onto medium-density fibreboard.

Laminate doesn't have the same look or durability as natural or engineered stone, but it's only a fraction of the price. It comes in a large variety of colours, patterns and finishes, including designs that mimic the look of stone or wood.

It can be sold in long lengths so there are fewer joints in the benchtop, and you can even opt for a 'coved' design that curves slightly up the wall so there's no joint at the back edge. You can also buy laminate benchtops from stores such as Ikea or other DIY kitchen renovation stores and install them yourself.

However, it's susceptible to burns, cuts and scratches, so you always need to use mats and chopping boards. It's difficult to repair dents and chips in the surface and abrasive cleaners will also leave marks.

A laminate benchtop can't usually support an undermount sink (which is attached to the underside of the bench, as opposed to a regular sink, which sits on top of the bench surrounded by a raised 'lip' where dirt can collect).

**Pros:** Inexpensive; huge choice of colours and designs; easy to maintain.

**Cons:** Difficult to repair chips; can't rest hot pans on or cut directly onto the surface; can't use abrasive cleaners on it.

## SOLID SURFACES

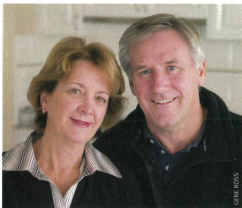
Solid-surface benchtops are made of a solid plastic block, so the colour and pattern are consistent throughout. Each benchtop is custom-made, so you can have a long or unusually shaped benchtop without worrying about joints.

It's non-porous and while it can be scratched by knives, marks can be sanded out. But it isn't heat-resistant so you'll need to put mats under hot pans.

One of the best known of these surfaces is Corian, made by Du Pont. It's made from two-thirds natural minerals combined with a high-performance acrylic. It can be made to appear like marble or granite and comes in a range of colours. Generally the plainer colours will be cheaper than those with a speckled pattern.

Solid surface doesn't have the natural beauty of stone and some people are put off by its uniform appearance. But it's also not as hard as stone so your plates and glasses are less likely to smash if dropped onto it.





### The stone look without the hassle

Isobel and John Stevenson chose an engineered stone benchtop with a standard pencil edge for their new kitchen.

"We liked the look of stone but we didn't want the hassle of having to seal granite every year," says Isobel.

They were also impressed by the range of colours available, and opted for a black stone with a white speckled pattern. They say that, so far, the benchtops have proved very durable and easy to clean.

It's very easy to clean and has hygienic properties similar to stainless steel (see right). It can even be moulded to include a sink and draining board, and 'coved' up the wall as a splashback so there's no join at the back edge.

Solid surface is one of the more expensive materials — generally even more expensive than natural or engineered stone.

**Pros:** Resistant to staining; no visible joins; hygienic; large variety of colours and patterns; custom-made to your specifications; can be used to create integral sinks and draining boards; dents, cuts and scratches can be easily repaired.

**Cons:** Not heat or scratch-resistant; uniform

appearance not for everyone; more expensive than most other materials.

### STAINLESS STEEL

Stainless steel is the benchtop of choice in busy restaurants for a number of reasons — it's easy to clean, hygienic and hard-wearing. But while it can provide a contemporary, minimalist look, stainless steel benchtops may not be ideal for the average domestic kitchen.

Stainless steel isn't scratch-resistant, so you'll either have to be extremely careful your knife doesn't slip off the chopping board or get used to the marks. Fingerprints also show up on its shiny surface, although the newer brushed and textured finishes can camouflage marks to some extent.

Many people see it as a very hygienic option for their kitchen, and rightly so. It's non-porous, which limits the growth of bacteria, and the sheets of steel can be formed to include a sink, draining board and splashback, so there are few joins. Where joins are necessary the two pieces of steel can be welded and polished to give an almost invisible seam, minimising the amount of food crumbs and grime that can collect in these areas. You can also put hot pans straight onto it without leaving a mark.

Stainless steel is typically applied to a plywood base to add strength and deaden its sound, but it can still be noisy. Price varies depending on the thickness of the steel but it's generally one of the most expensive options.





**Pros:** Hygienic; easy to clean; can withstand hot pans; can be worked to create integral sinks and draining boards.

**Cons:** Shows scratches, dents and fingerprints; expensive; can be noisy; can't use abrasive cleaners.

## TIMBER

Timber benchtops aren't very fashionable at the moment but they're still favoured by those looking for a country or 'rustic' look.

Timber is strong and long-lasting, and is easy on your knives, but it isn't heat or scratch-resistant, though some marks from knives or hot pans can be removed by sanding and reapplying the top finish. It's important to mop up liquid spills quickly as they may damage the wood, and generally these benchtops should be oiled or resealed every year.

Timber benchtops are available in many different hardwood varieties. The timber is usually laminated to make it more stable and to avoid joins, but marine plywood can also be used.

Ready-to-install laminated timber benchtops can also be purchased from stores such as Ikea or other DIY kitchen renovation stores.

Price varies depending on the type of timber you choose, but it can be an expensive option.

**Pros:** Strong and long-lasting; won't blunt your knives.

**Cons:** Not heat or scratch-resistant; requires regular resealing; relatively expensive.

## CERAMIC TILES

Ceramic tiles aren't a popular benchtop choice at the moment, with the current trend favouring the minimalist, streamlined look.

There are a number of drawbacks to tiling your whole benchtop. While the tiles themselves might be easy to clean, the grout between them is a different story. You have to constantly clean the grooves between tiles to prevent dirt collecting in them, which is not only unhygienic but can stain the grout, though using epoxy and/or tinted grout can help avoid that.

Tiles may also chip or crack if a heavy pan is dropped on them.

Having said that, the range of colours and styles available in ceramic tiles make them a good option for perking up your benchtop as a trim, if you don't mind the additional joins.

Price varies depending on the type of tiles you choose.

**Pros:** Large range of colours and styles; easy to clean tiles.

**Cons:** Chips easily; dirt collects between tiles; grout can stain.

## Splashbacks

Splashbacks protect the wall behind the countertop from any bits of flying food or splashing liquid. A splashback can be made from a continuous run of one material, including the same material as the benchtop, from tiles with grouted joins, or from glass.

Given its place in the firing line, a splashback should be waterproof and easy to clean. If you have a join between the splashback and the benchtop you need to make sure it's properly sealed so dirt doesn't collect there. Some benchtop surfaces, such as laminate, solid surface and stainless steel may be 'coved' to continue up the wall so there's no join at all.

Glass splashbacks are also a very popular choice at the moment. They're available in many different colours and designs, and are very easy to clean as you don't have to worry about dirt collecting in the grout, as you do with tiles. They're usually made from 6 mm toughened glass for strength and durability.

### WHAT SIZE ?

*As a general rule, a benchtop along a wall should be around 600–650 mm in depth – any deeper and it becomes too far to reach. If one person usually prepares the food it should be a minimum of 600 mm long; 900 mm is better. If two people generally prepare food side-by-side the length should be 1200–1500 mm.*



## EDGES

Benchtop edges come in a variety of styles and can give a cheaper counter some added flair, but some options can be expensive and may not be available in all materials.

Most materials have a standard thickness for edges (for example, 20 mm for granite). Thicker edges or edges that require more workmanship, such as the bullnose or bevel styles, will cost more. But you might want to consider rounded edges if you have small children as they hurt less when bumped into.



Fresh fruit and veg aren't always as fresh as you might think — but there are ways to pick the best.

# Getting fresh?

## IN A NUTSHELL

■ The fresh fruit and veg in your local supermarket or greengrocer might not really be that fresh. Apples can be months old; even perishable fruit such as strawberries might have been harvested up to three weeks ago.

■ This lack of genuine freshness can affect the flavour, texture and nutritional value.

■ While there's no guarantee, it might be worth trying your local farmers' market for fresh fruit and veg — you're likely to be buying direct from the grower, so there's no long supply chain.

**W**e've all bought fruit that looks delicious and turns out to be tasteless or rock-hard; or green vegetables that are droopy and stale by the time you serve them for dinner. Is it because they're not as fresh as you'd expect (or at least hope) — that the demands of storing and transporting the fruit and veg mean you're not getting them at their best? And does it make a difference where you buy them from?

This article looks at some of the reasons why supposedly fresh fruit and veg are often disappointing. But first we wanted to see what some experts thought of some samples bought from various outlets.

## STRAWBERRIES AND TOMATOES ON TEST

We bought strawberries and tomatoes from three Coles and three Woolworths stores, and five independent fruit shops in different parts of Sydney in late May 2006. Our lab assessed the fruit for appearance — experts noted the percentage of surface blemishes, such as cuts, bruises and mould or rot (and, for strawberries, the percentage that was a deep red colour). We also carried out chemical tests, measuring the levels of sugar, acidity and the volatile compounds that give the fruit its aroma. An

expert taste panel then rated the fruit for aroma and flavour, and gave each sample an overall score.

### ■ Strawberries

On average we paid half as much again for strawberries from independent fruit shops compared with the big supermarket chains, but the overall quality of the fruit was much the same.

Coles had the reddest and ripest strawberries (imported from California) and these were marginally preferred by the tasters. Even so, their overall 'liking' scores for all the strawberries only had a range of 6–7 out of 10. The Californian strawberries had lower levels of aroma compounds than Australian fruit, probably because they were less fresh as a result of the longer transport time.

The Australian strawberries were often under-ripe, especially those from Victoria. May (when we tested) is not a good time of year for Australian strawberries — too late in the season for southern areas and too early for the Queensland producers of winter fruit.

### ■ Tomatoes

We bought three types of tomato: regular (the cheapest), truss (usually still attached to the vine and the most expensive) and whatever intermediate

grade the shop had (typically called 'gourmet' or 'hydroponic'). We didn't test Roma or cherry tomatoes — but we included two sets of organic tomatoes for comparison.

Again, there were no major differences between the quality of the fruit from Coles, Woolworths and the independent fruit shops. But the tasters rated none of the tomatoes very highly for 'liking' — just 4–5 out of 10.

So is it worth paying extra for truss tomatoes? While they had the highest levels of aroma compounds and the best aroma scores, the overall flavour of truss tomatoes wasn't obviously better. On average, the regular tomatoes had more blemishes and less depth of colour and lower levels of aroma compounds than the other types, but the tasters didn't rate them significantly different overall.

The tasters in fact rated the organic tomatoes highest for flavour and overall liking. They had higher levels of sugar and acid, which probably gave them a greater depth of flavour. The lab report stresses that this preference for organic tomatoes was a tendency rather than a statistical difference, but it's an interesting finding. While enthusiasts for organic food often claim it tastes better, there's little scientific evidence to support this.

## HOW FRESH IS 'FRESH'?

What distinguishes fresh fruit and vegetables from the canned or frozen versions is that they're still alive (in the sense of cell activity still happening) — but slowly dying and deteriorating. While they're growing they're connected to roots that give them water and leaves that provide the food energy needed to grow; once harvested and separated from their sources of food and water it's downhill from then on.

Some fruit (such as tomatoes, bananas, mangoes and peaches) continue to ripen after they're picked, but they might not develop as good a flavour as when they're ripened on the vine or tree. Vegetables just slowly deteriorate.

Ideally produce should be harvested at its peak and eaten before it's had time to deteriorate — but obviously this can't be done unless you grow your own. In reality apples can be up to a year old when you buy them; grapes can have been stored for over two months — and even highly perishable fruit like strawberries might have been picked up to three weeks previously (see the table on page 22 for details on how long different fruit can be stored before going on sale).

## THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

In theory you should always be able to get fresh fruit and veg. With climates ranging from tropical North Queensland to cool temperate Tasmania, we can grow produce such as lettuce, broccoli, tomatoes and bananas somewhere in Australia all year round. And advances in technology should have made it possible for this produce to get to your local supermarket or greengrocer in good condition, regardless of distance. So why is the quality often disappointing?

Most commercial growers either sell their produce through the central markets in the major cities or directly to the big supermarket chains. Both involve loading and offloading from trucks and transporting the produce over long distances — sometimes even from overseas.

Advances in technology have made it possible to extend the seasonal availability of fruit and veg by storing them and transporting them under conditions that'll get them to market still looking good. For example:

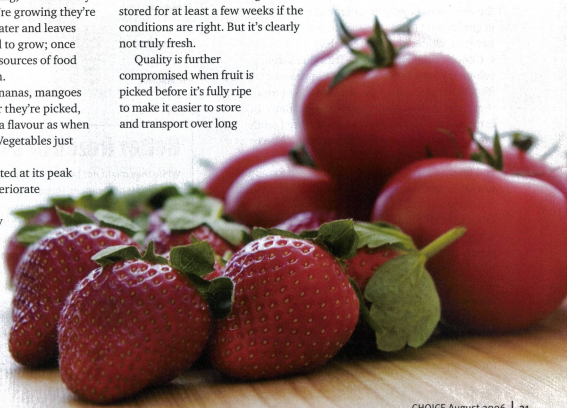
- Produce is chilled as soon as possible after harvest so that it deteriorates much more slowly.
- Controlled atmosphere storage and packaging (with lower levels of oxygen and higher levels of carbon dioxide than normal air) can slow down deterioration even further.
- Fruit is often sprayed with fungicides to prevent it from going mouldy.

A huge amount of research has been done in this area and most fruit and veg can now be stored for at least a few weeks if the conditions are right. But it's clearly not truly fresh.

Quality is further compromised when fruit is picked before it's fully ripe to make it easier to store and transport over long

## BOXED IN

*The Coles and Woolworths supermarket chains now use special crates for produce that take it from the farm to the point of sale without the need for any repacking. Coles told us the crates are better ventilated than cardboard or Styrofoam boxes and, as they're reused, better for the environment. But not all farmers are using them — and though they may reduce the amount of handling, the produce isn't getting to the store any quicker.*



## TEST: Fresh fruit and veg?

distances. And varieties are often chosen more for ease of storage and transport than for their flavour.

### DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

They may look perfect, but the nutrient content of fresh vegetables decreases during storage (even more so at higher temperatures than when they're kept chilled). English spinach, for example, retains only 53% of its folate and 54% of its carotene after just eight days stored at fridge temperature.

The substances that give the fruit and veg their flavours are also easily lost (for more on this see *Strawberries and tomatoes on test*, page 20). And as vegetables age, they can develop unpleasant smells and bitter flavours, and droop or get tough and woody. Apples that have been in cold storage for too long have less flavour and aroma, and they can go floury quickly unless you keep them in the fridge.

It's best to buy fruit and veg in small lots, once a week or more often, and use them quickly.

### PICK OF THE CROP

Our test found no major differences between the quality of strawberries and tomatoes from the two big supermarket chains and independent fruit shops. So how do you pick the best from what's available in any of them?

■ **Follow the seasons.** Now that so much is available for most of the year it's easy to lose track of the seasonality of fresh produce. The table tells you the best times of year for different fruit. Vegies vary in quality a lot less as they're more robust, and we haven't included them in the table.

■ **Choose ripe fruit.** Choose fruit that's well coloured with a bright and 'fresh' appearance. While it's no guarantee, it's a good indication of fruit that's still in good condition. But appearance isn't everything: also feel for a tender texture (gentle pressure between your fingers and palm won't cause bruising) and take a sniff. Smell the stem end for stone fruits and the blossom end for apples, tomatoes and melons; only buy fruit that has a full, fruity aroma.

■ **Take a close look at your veg.** Green vegetables should be crisp and really green — not shrivelled or yellow. With broccoli and lettuce, check that there's no rot at the end of the stem. Avoid carrots whose tips are going brown — and while leaves on carrots look lovely, they're best cut off because they can dry the carrots out. If you don't like the look of what's on offer in the fresh produce section you're probably better off buying frozen or canned vegies (see *Better frozen or canned?*, right).

#### FRUIT IN SEASON

1 When it's at its best



## Better frozen or canned?

While they might not be as crisp and crunchy, frozen vegetables retain most of their nutrients and can be more nutritious than 'fresh' vegetables that have been transported over long distances. Frozen peas, for example, typically have 60% more carotene than 'fresh' peas and the vitamin C content is comparable with fresh peas that have been stored and then cooked.

Canned vegetables (and fruit) also retain most of their original nutrients. They have less vitamin C, but the levels of dietary fibre, carotene and folate, for example, aren't much affected by the canning process. Watch out for added salt in canned vegetables, though — check the label and look for low-salt or salt-free brands.



| Storage time before sale | What to look for                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 months                 | Firm, well-coloured fruit. Check for a full apple aroma by sniffing the non-stem end.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Weeks                    | Plump and juicy-looking fruit with a uniform golden-orange colour. Ripe apricots yield to gentle pressure on the skin.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Weeks                    | Choose fruit with an unblemished skin and pick it up and make sure it feels heavy. If you want one that's ripe, give it a gentle squeeze — it should be just a little soft.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Weeks                    | Fruit that's firm, bright, and free from bruises or other injuries. Tastes vary, but for most people bananas taste best when the skin is speckled with brown. Bananas with green tips or with practically no yellow colour have not developed their full flavour, but they'll continue to ripen in the fruit bowl.                             |
| Weeks                    | Bright, glossy, plump-looking surfaces. Stems should be green.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Weeks                    | Well-coloured, plump grapes that are firmly attached to the stem. Stems should be green and plump. White or green grapes are sweetest when they have a yellowish hue, with a tinge of amber.                                                                                                                                                   |
| Weeks                    | A soft, velvety texture, slight softening at the non-stem end, a faint fruity aroma and a yellowish-white to creamy rind colour.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 7 months                 | Plump, unwrinkled fruit, either firm or slightly yielding. Kiwifruit is ripe when it gives to the touch but isn't soft. Sometimes the fruit has a 'water-stained' exterior — it's normal and doesn't affect the taste. You can eat the skin.                                                                                                   |
| Weeks                    | Look for a green, healthy calyx (where the blossom was attached to the fruit). Heavy and firm fruit with a rich yellow colour and reasonably smooth-textured skin with a slight gloss. A pale or greenish-yellow colour means very fresh fruit with slightly higher acidity. Course or rough skin texture means thick skin and not much juice. |
| Weeks                    | Deep yellow or orange colour and a bright lustre.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Weeks                    | Plump fruit with a smooth skin that has at least begun to turn from green to orange/yellow or red, and a slight softness. Look for round 'shoulders' at the stem end of the fruit, especially early in the season.                                                                                                                             |
| 3 weeks                  | Rich colour and plumpness, and a slight softening along the 'seam' — the ridge that runs down one side of the fruit. Some varieties are orange-yellow between the red areas, others are greenish. Hard, tan stains on the skin don't affect the taste.                                                                                         |
| Weeks                    | Firm, heavy fruit with fresh, bright-looking skin that's smooth for the variety. And look for a healthy, green calyx. There are two main varieties — navels (best May to October) and Valencias (best November to April). Navels tend to be sweeter and better-eating.                                                                         |
| 3 weeks                  | Fruit that's fairly firm or a little soft. The skin between the red areas should be yellow, or at least creamy. The amount of red blush doesn't indicate ripeness.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 9 months                 | Fruit that has begun to soften (that increases the odds that it will ripen properly).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Weeks                    | Bright yellow-orange colour, fragrant pineapple aroma, and a very slight separation of the eyes (the berry-like fruitlets that run in a spiral pattern on the skin).                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 6 weeks                  | Plump fruit that's fairly firm to slightly soft and smells like a plum.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Weeks                    | A ripe rockmelon has a yellowish rind, a fruity smell, and yields slightly to light thumb pressure on the non-stem end. And look at the stem scar; avoid melons with bits of attached stem — they were harvested too early. Small bruises don't normally damage the fruit.                                                                     |
| Weeks                    | Berries with a full red colour and bright lustre, firm flesh, and the stem still attached. Medium to small strawberries usually taste better than larger ones. Should have a nice strong strawberry aroma. Variety is important but not often displayed on the punnet. Camarosas are specially good.                                           |
| Weeks                    | Firm, juicy flesh with good red colour and dark-brown or black seeds (whitish seeds mean the melon is immature). With uncut watermelon, look for a smooth, slightly dull surface. The ends should be filled-out and rounded, and the 'belly' (the underside that rests on the ground) should have a creamy colour.                             |

= available  
 = at their best

### 1 When it's at its best

This shows when you can expect different fruit to be available in your local supermarket, and when it should be at its best. The dates are only an approximate guide because they'll vary to some extent from year to year, depending on weather conditions. There'll also be some differences depending on what part of Australia you live in. And with fruit like apples, for example, there are differences between varieties.

### 2 Storage time before sale

This is the maximum length of time for which the fruit can be stored under controlled conditions. They're not necessarily stored for this long.

## Farmers' markets

While there's no guarantee, you're more likely to find really fresh fruit and veg at your local farmers' market. You're likely to be buying direct from the grower so there's no long supply chain.

Farmers often get a better return than from selling through the big supermarket chains, and a recent survey commissioned by the Commonwealth Government's Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation found that consumers had a high level of satisfaction. But of course there's a more limited range of produce available, especially during the winter months.

There are websites that tell you where to find your nearest market — for example, [www.farmersmarkets.org.au](http://www.farmersmarkets.org.au).



Good news — you no longer need to pay a fortune for a good-quality LCD TV.

# LCD TVs



## IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: Twelve 81 cm LCD TVs priced between \$1699 and \$2900. Prices have fallen considerably in the past six months.

■ We found big differences in picture and sound quality and it isn't necessarily dictated by price.

**F**alling prices have made sleek, flat-panelled LCD TVs an affordable option for more consumers. Prices have dropped dramatically since our last test in 2005, when 66 cm LCDs cost between \$1300 and \$3000. Six months later we bought 81 cm LCD TVs for around the same price. Competition in the LCD market is fierce and, with the big players continuing to invest heavily in production, prices are likely to fall further, so be sure to shop around for the best deal.

## THE TEST

We tested twelve 81 cm (32 inch) LCD televisions priced from \$1699 to \$2900. We compared the quality of the picture and sound, how easy the TVs were to set up and use and the amount of energy they used when they were left in stand-by mode. We also tested their stability — an important consideration if you have small children who could push or pull them over.

The results were varied, particularly in relation to the quality of the picture, where scores ranged from 55% to 85%. There were also big differences in sound quality, and paying more didn't guarantee the best results. The ACER scored a very good 80% for picture quality and was one of the cheaper models at \$1999. That said, not all the cheaper options performed well. The two cheapest models we tested (SANSUI and MAGNAVOX) were among the lowest scorers overall.

## DO I NEED A SET-TOP BOX?

Some LCD TVs have a built-in digital tuner, which means you don't need to buy a separate set-top box to watch digital programs. These are known as integrated digital televisions (IDTV). However, they're still relatively rare. Of the models we tested only the LG has a built-in digital tuner, and this only receives standard definition — if you wanted to watch high-definition programs you'd still need to buy a high-definition digital set-top box.

All except the SHARP are high-definition capable, which means you can watch high-definition television if you buy a high-definition digital set-top box.

## LCD OR PLASMA?

It's hard to deny that LCD TVs look more impressive than the bulky old CRT (cathode ray tube) TVs. They often operate at a higher resolution, so the picture quality is generally sharper. But the debate over LCD versus plasma technology is more controversial. In November 2005, CHOICE trialists found no clear favourite when watching the two types of TV. The decision largely came down to personal taste and the individual TV rather than the type of technology it used.



Generally, plasma TVs come in much larger screen sizes although, with improving technology, the range of LCD screen sizes is also increasing.

Both plasma and LCD technology have had problems, but these are also being overcome. Plasma TVs may have an issue with 'burn-in', where a static image on the screen becomes semi-permanent if it's displayed for long periods (such as a TV station logo). Burn-in is most likely to happen in the first 100 hours of use and it's becoming less common as the technology continues to improve.

The 'dead pixel' problem has also beset both LCD and plasma technology. The screens are made up of hundreds of thousands of tiny segments (pixels) that form images. A pixel 'dies' when it gets stuck in a particular form (such as a particular colour). While you're unlikely to notice one isolated dead pixel, a cluster in one area can appear as a spot on your screen. But improvements in manufacturing mean this is no longer a big problem. In our last test of plasma TVs in March we didn't find any dead pixels in the tested sets, and in this test only four models had a single dead pixel; the others didn't have any at all.

Still, if you can find them, it's worth checking the manufacturer's warranty conditions for dead pixels — just in case.

## WHAT TO BUY

|                      |        |
|----------------------|--------|
| SHARP LC-32AF3X      | \$2599 |
| PHILIPS 32PF7320/79  | \$2900 |
| HITACHI 32LD380TA    | \$2399 |
| PANASONIC TX-32LX60A | \$2529 |
| LG 32LX2D-AA         | \$2499 |
| ACER AT3201W         | \$1999 |
| SONY KLV-S32A10      | \$2578 |

## CLEANING TIPS

LCD screens are more delicate than traditional CRT screens. Some manufacturers recommend wiping the screen with a soft cloth to clean it. For stubborn marks, moisten the cloth with water. Some TVs include a cleaning cloth.

## What to look for

- Check how the picture looks if you step to the side or move up and down. Viewing angles have improved in the newer models, but some still have a dimmer picture when viewed from different angles — important if several people are watching the TV at once.
- Try to watch a variety of TV programs in the shop. In particular, look for natural skin tones on a person in a studio setting, such as a news presenter.
- Also check the picture for a 'colour cast', such as a pinkish or greenish tinge to the picture that can't be completely fixed by adjusting the controls.
- Look for easy-to-use inputs that allow you easy access to the connections for DVD players, PlayStations, etc.
- Check that the connections on the TV match the output on the devices you want to hook up to it (such as DVD player/recorder, cable TV, PlayStation, etc), and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time. HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface) is an all-digital connection for both sound and video in one cable. You may not have any gadgets with HDMI output at the moment but we expect more to use them in the future, so it might be worth looking out for a TV with at least one HDMI socket. For more information on TV connections go to [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au) and type '81 cm LCD' into the search box, then click on the 'Connections' page.
- If you want to use your TV as a computer display, you'll need one with a DVI input for newer computers or a VGA input for older computers. In our test only the **SHARP** and **PANASONIC** didn't have these connections. An HDMI socket would do if your computer had an HDMI output or you had a DVI-HDMI converter cable.
- If you're likely to lose the remote control, choose a TV with easily accessible controls on the TV itself. A number of models we tested had the volume and channel controls on top of the TV, making them difficult to use if it was mounted on the wall.

## Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.

### SHARP LC-32AF3X

Price: \$2599

#### GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture quality.
- Best sound quality of all models tested.
- HDMI socket (see *What to look for*, page 25).
- Three-year warranty.
- One of the easiest to set up.

#### BAD POINTS

- There's no menu button on the TV itself (a problem if you can't find the remote).



### PHILIPS 32PF7320/79

Price: \$2900

#### GOOD POINTS

- Best picture quality in the test.
- HDMI socket.
- Three-year warranty.

#### BAD POINTS

- Some labelling on the remote control is hard to read.
- Images on the screen aren't as well centred as on most other models tested.



### HITACHI 32LD380TA

Price: \$2399

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good picture quality.
- Second best sound quality of all models tested.
- HDMI socket.

#### BAD POINTS

- Some labelling on the remote control is hard to read.



### PANASONIC TX-32LX60A

Price: \$2529

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good picture quality.
- Relatively easy to use the remote control.
- Two HDMI sockets.

#### BAD POINTS

- Can't tune to UHF channels 70-75 (which might be a problem for people in apartment blocks that use a cable retransmission system).



\* Measured and rounded up to the nearest 0.5 cm, with the base attached and all protruding parts included, cord and connecting cables excluded, screen untitled and unswivelled if applicable.

\*\* Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in June 2006, unless otherwise noted.

(A) Discontinued but may still be available in some stores.

(B) The price we paid in March/April 2006.

| Brand / model (in rank order) | PERFORMANCE         |                             |                           |                         |                            | FEATURES | SPECIFICATIONS    |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
|                               | 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Picture quality score (%) | 3 Sound quality score (%) | 4 Ease of use score (%) | 5 Standby energy score (%) |          |                   |
| SHARP LC-32AF3X               | 77                  | 82                          | 76                        | 59                      | 90                         | S, T     | 64.5 x 80 x 29    |
| PHILIPS 32PF7320/79           | 75                  | 85                          | 64                        | 55                      | 90                         |          | 55 x 92.5 x 22    |
| HITACHI 32LD380TA             | 74                  | 76                          | 74                        | 61                      | 90                         |          | 60.5 x 82 x 33.5  |
| PANASONIC TX-32LX60A          | 74                  | 78                          | 67                        | 65                      | 90                         | S        | 62 x 79 x 30      |
| LG 32LX2D-AA (A)              | 73                  | 83                          | 55                        | 64                      | 80                         | S        | 62 x 92 x 29      |
| ACER AT3201W                  | 72                  | 80                          | 59                        | 60                      | 80                         | S        | 62.5 x 101.5 x 22 |
| SONY KLV-S32A10               | 70                  | 75                          | 65                        | 53                      | 90                         | S, T     | 61.5 x 79.5 x 31  |
| SAMSUNG LA32M61BX/XSA         | 65                  | 72                          | 40                        | 61                      | 90                         | S        | 62.5 x 80 x 25    |
| SANSUI SAN3201                | 60                  | 57                          | 61                        | 61                      | 70                         |          | 64 x 104 x 24     |
| SANYO LCD-32XR1               | 60                  | 62                          | 51                        | 53                      | 80                         | S, T     | 57 x 99 x 26      |
| BENQ DV3250 (A)               | 59                  | 58                          | 54                        | 66                      | 60                         |          | 59.5 x 99.5 x 19  |
| MAGNAVOX MLCD32               | 59                  | 55                          | 64                        | 55                      | 80                         |          | 56 x 96 x 25      |



### LG 32LX2D-AA

Price: \$2499

#### GOOD POINTS

- Second best picture quality.
- Has a digital tuner.
- Relatively easy to use the remote control.
- HDMI socket.

#### BAD POINTS

- Lack of detail in bright areas unless the contrast is set low.
- Underscans (trims the edges of the picture) more than the other models tested.
- Can't tune to UHF channels 70-75.
- Lowest sound quality score in the *What to buy* list.



### ACER AT3201W

Price: \$1999

#### GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture quality.
- Three-year warranty.
- DVI socket (see *What to look for*).
- Cheapest in the *What to buy* list.

#### BAD POINTS

- No manual fine-tuning.

### SONY KLV-S32A10

Price: \$2578

#### GOOD POINTS

- Good picture quality.

#### BAD POINTS

- No DVI or HDMI socket.
- The remote control has very small buttons and labels, and the 'menu' button is confusingly called 'Wega Gate'.



## WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ The **SAMSUNG LA32M61BX/XSA** has good picture quality but the worst sound quality score (a poor 40%) in the test, perhaps because its speakers point downwards rather than towards the listener. It also failed one of the standard stability tests (see *Beware of little hands*, below).

■ The **SANYO LCD-32XR1** has slightly unnatural colours in its pictures, which also lack detail in dark areas. It also failed one of the standard stability tests.

■ The picture quality of the **SANSUI SAN3201**, **BENQ DV3250** and **MAGNAVOX MLCD32** isn't as good as the other models tested.

## BEWARE OF LITTLE HANDS

LCD TVs are much lighter than the old CRT models, but they could still cause serious injury if they fell on a child. We tested the TVs according to the safety requirements of the Australian Standard. Both the **SAMSUNG** and **SANYO** models failed one of the standard stability tests. This wouldn't be a concern if you intend to mount the television on the wall, which is probably a good idea with any LCD TV if you have small children, as the screens are much less hardy than the traditional CRT glass screens.

| Warranty (years) | Origin   | Manufacturer / distributor | Price (\$)** |
|------------------|----------|----------------------------|--------------|
|                  | Japan    | Sharp                      | 2599         |
|                  | China    | Philips                    | 2900         |
|                  | Thailand | Hitachi                    | 2399         |
|                  | China    | Panasonic                  | 2529         |
|                  | Korea    | LG                         | 2499         |
|                  | China    | Acer Computer              | 1999         |
|                  | Japan    | Sony                       | 2578 (B)     |
|                  | Korea    | Samsung                    | 2499         |
|                  | China    | Yale Appliance Group       | 1699 (B)     |
|                  | China    | Sanyo                      | 1999         |
|                  | Taiwan   | BenQ                       | 1899         |
|                  | China    | Mistral                    | 1799         |

### 1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Picture quality: 50%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Standby energy score: 10%

### 2 Picture quality score

This is made up of:

- Visual evaluation of motion pictures: 80%
- Visual and geometric assessment of picture patterns: 10%
- Image processor assessment (looking for defects such as

unnatural skin tones and blurring of detail): 10%

### 3 Sound quality score

This is made up of:

- General listening assessment: 80%
- Technical sound test (measuring the frequency range, response and smoothness): 20%

### 4 Ease of use score

This is made up of:

- Remote control: 50%
- Onscreen display (including whether onscreen menus are simple

and well-organised): 20%

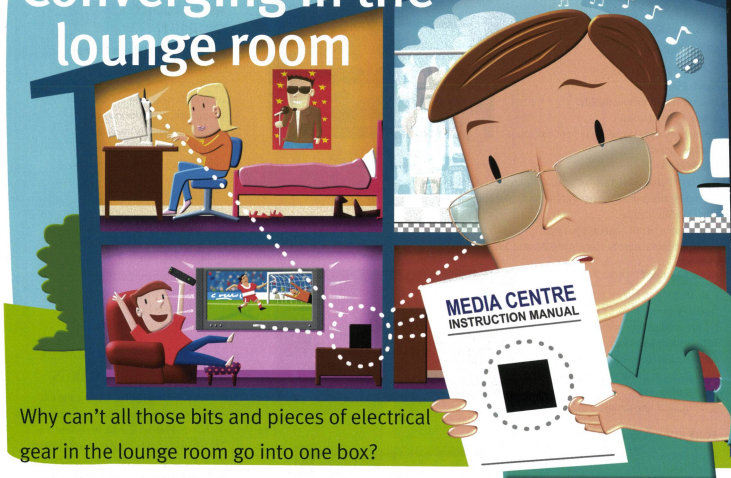
■ Tuning and setting up channels: 20%

■ Onboard controls (including location and ease of access): 10%

### 5 Standby energy score

This looks at the energy used when the TV is turned off but can be turned on by the remote. The lower the usage the higher the score. It's based on the TV being on standby for 19 hours a day and turned on for the rest of the time.

# Converging in the lounge room



Why can't all those bits and pieces of electrical gear in the lounge room go into one box?

## IN A NUTSHELL

Media PCs may combine a few home entertainment products, but they aren't without problems.

The question of what is fair use and who owns what in the digital world remains a vexed question.

In the world of home entertainment, convergence is a term that means the combination of many products into a single device that not only plays music and video, but also allows you to connect to the internet and perhaps even send music, video and data to various rooms in your house simultaneously. The hub of this sort of system is a computer often called a 'media centre'.

However, it's not yet an easy road to a world of centralised entertainment. It means combining the world of computers that can do 'everything' in one box with that of separate components that do just one or two things each. Also, you may find connections are limited, or the quality of the output isn't quite as good as individual dedicated high-end components.

Media-centre computers can be relatively expensive compared with normal home entertainment equipment. In this article we're looking at the comparatively cheap option of using one system to manage sound and video, along with internet and computer gaming throughout your house. However, there are systems designed to manage entertainment in a number of rooms, plus

your home's security and heating/cooling systems as well, but they tend to start at around \$20,000.

## WHAT'S IN THE BOX

Most home entertainment products these days are really small computers designed to do a particular set of tasks: for example, a set-top box with hard drive decodes and converts digital TV signals into analogue, so your analogue TV can display them, and it also lets you store them for watching later; a DVD recorder plays and burns DVDs just like the DVD drive in a computer. They both have a central processing unit (CPU) that does the bulk of the computing. Putting everything in one box instead means the CPU has to deal with those functions and many more besides, so it needs to be powerful.

In effect, a media centre computer is a CD/DVD player/recorder that can store music and video on its hard drive, as well as a set-top box that may have more than one digital TV tuner and can record TV.

In addition it's like any other computer: it can run a wide variety of software, allowing you to play games as well as connecting to the internet, or do



SIMON BOSCH

work-related tasks. It can be networked with other devices so the sound, video and data on its hard disc can be sent from one room to a number of others simultaneously. However, if you want to put the computer in a room other than where you're listening to music or watching TV, you'll need more gear to do it.

## THE ADVANTAGES

■ **One box, one remote and a relatively consistent set of menus** for playing, recording and managing both your music and video will probably be attractive. Also, for some families, being able to play computer games or access the internet while someone's watching TV in another room, all controlled by the same box, may save space as well as being convenient.

■ Your TV can be a **computer screen** as well as showing TV and DVDs, etc.

■ If you've got a **wireless keyboard** you can move it around and, depending on the way the system's set up, you can work (using a normal monitor) in rooms other than the one with the media centre in it.

■ Having a **connection to the internet** lets you manage email and other communications from your lounge room, as well as connecting to websites when they're mentioned on TV shows.

■ As video becomes more available online, the convenience of being able to **download a movie and watch it instantly** may be tempting, especially on cold wintry nights, but you'll need a broadband internet connection to make it work.

■ **Upgrading** one component doesn't mean buying a completely new system. You can put in the latest DVD drive or add a bigger hard disc (as long as it's compatible with the rest of the system) at relatively low cost. Software upgrades may also increase the system's efficiency or even add new functions.

## THE DISADVANTAGES

■ **Cost:** A media-centre PC is likely to cost around \$3000. If you bought a home theatre system instead, with a DVD recorder as an extra (\$2000 in total), and a set-top box/hard disc (\$400), you'd still be ahead and that includes a set of speakers — but it means no internet functionality.

■ **Wires:** Using wires to connect your speakers and TV to the PC can be expensive (and messy) if your PC is located in another room. Also, long distances may mean reduced image or sound quality.

■ **Extra connections:** If you want to connect to a TV in another room without wires you'll need a device to send the signal and a receiver in the TV that can also send back infrared signals from your remote so the PC can change channels for you, which is an extra \$100 or more.

■ **Quality concerns:** Some media PCs are limited to either a digital output connection for video (these are called DVI or HDMI and should be clearly labelled on the device), or an analogue S-video connection. The latter isn't quite good enough quality for high-definition plasma and LCD screens. Some come with analogue component connections, which are better quality than S-video, but you'll need to check. This is important if you want the best-quality image possible from your system and to make sure you get the best match between your TV and media PC.

■ **Media PCs are normally bigger** than most home entertainment components and can be noisy. Generally the more expensive ones will have fewer fans and quieter components.

■ **Space:** Computers generate a lot of heat and need plenty of space to allow air to flow around them.

■ It's a computer and will need the normal **maintenance** any computer requires (managing



**DIY**

*You can build your own system based on a conventional computer, but you need quite a bit of technical know-how to buy the right components and assemble it. One for the buffs really.*

upgrades to the operating system, doing the occasional hard disc clean-up and so on) plus virus and firewall protection to keep you free of viruses and other internet nasties. Also, wireless networks are far from easy to set up and manage if you're not very computer-savvy.

**THE WIDER ISSUES**

There's no guarantee that the future will be one-box-fits-all, but it's very clear that computer-based home entertainment products are here to stay. But they bring with them some real problems that we've not had to confront in the past.

Some copyright owners (mainly large corporations) have been very vocal in condemning what they see as breaches of their ownership rights — mainly over music and video products. They've complained that digitisation has made their product easy to copy and distribute and have begun to use various technical means to try and limit what they see as theft.

Unfortunately, in introducing new technical limitations on the use of some of their products they've reduced the products' usefulness — in some cases, even, rendering it unusable in some situations. An example is a copy-protected music CD that will play in a DVD player, but not in a media centre PC's DVD drive. Even if it did play, it wouldn't allow a copy to be made to be stored on the hard disc, to enable you to play different CDs in separate rooms. In many cases CDs with this sort of limitation will also fail to work in some car CD players.

Sony has been widely condemned for introducing software on some of its CDs sold since 2005 that is so poorly devised that it can compromise the security of the computer you play it on if you're connected to the internet. That's bad enough, but the fact that hidden software installs itself without the user's knowledge or consent highlights just how vulnerable consumers are in this digital marketplace.

Downloading video from the internet on a pay-per-view basis may be a good idea in principle. Currently, however, a system such as BigPond Movies requires you to download extra software to make sure the movie file will self-destruct after a set time. This set-up process can be time-consuming as well as being more complicated, and overall it's not significantly cheaper than taking a trip to the local DVD store. Obviously once you're over the set-up hurdle the process is simpler and quicker, but the cost seems hard to justify.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

Ultimately, consumers will decide whether or not we have a one-box future. What we've seen so far looks promising, but setting up and using the devices need to be a good deal easier.

Meanwhile the legal and moral rights issues are far from settled and currently inhibit progress. Who wants a CD that will play in only some players, and not in a computer without compromising its security? Certainly not consumers.

Downloading movies and music is proving to be a popular activity and faster broadband combined with media PC systems will make it even more attractive. However, consumers will have to make their views clear about pricing. Would you buy a movie download that you can watch for one day before it self-destructs, when hiring the same movie on DVD — with extra features — for a few days costs the same? Looks like we'll be walking to the DVD shop for a while yet. ■



# FLEX APPEAL

We put bendy bakeware  
to the test.



PHOTO: JENNE ROSS

## IN A NUTSHELL

- Silicone bakeware cools to the touch faster and is easier to store than regular bakeware. It can also go in your dishwasher without rusting.
- Price isn't an indicator of performance.

## WHAT TO BUY

|                                |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Jamie Oliver by Tefal</b>   |         |
| Six-hole muffin pan            | \$49.95 |
| <b>Wiltshire Bend 'n' Bake</b> |         |
| Six-hole muffin pan            | \$14.99 |
| Round pan                      | \$15.99 |
| Baking sheet                   | \$10.99 |

The **JAMIE OLIVER** muffin pan clocked in with the highest overall score in our test but is expensive. We wanted to test the range's round cake pan too,

but it wasn't available when we were buying.

If you're looking for something cheaper the **WILTSHIRE** isn't quite as easy to use but is good value and cooks just as well.

Although **PYREX** has a high score we didn't include it in the *What to buy* list because the silicone split near the handles of both muffin pans and we're concerned about durability.

It's shiny, rubbery and comes in a rainbow of different colours. In fact some of it looks like it would be more at home in the bathtub than the kitchen, but 'bendy' bakeware is one of the latest cooking products to hit the shelves.

This new breed of bakeware is made from silicone, and manufacturers promise a product that's easy to clean, resistant to staining, rolls up for storage and is of course flexible, so muffins and cakes pop out of the pan with minimum fuss. For anyone who's wrestled with a knife and a traditional metal baking tin full of reluctant muffins, or who has a kamikaze cake-tin cupboard, this all sounds like good news. So we put the 'bendy bakeware' to the test.

## BEND AND STRETCH

We tested 10 brands of silicone bakeware, including where available a range of products from each brand — a cake pan, muffin pan and baking sheet. We also compared their performance to traditional non-stick metal bakeware.

To put it through its paces, our home economist baked a range of treats: sponge cakes and chocolate banana muffins in the pans, and focaccia on the baking sheets.

On the whole all the brands gave excellent results in the cooking tests, but some are much easier to use. Some have firm handles and thicker silicone, which make all the difference getting bakeware in and out of the oven, not to mention into the dishwasher.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

While all the brands cooked well, so did their conventional metal counterparts. The regular non-stick metal cookware did as good a job overall as the top three silicone brands, so there's little or no advantage in cooking performance. The big advantage of silicone bakeware is its ease of use:

- It's flexible.
- It can be rolled up, folded or stacked.
- It can be put in the dishwasher without rusting.
- It's very light.
- It also won't rust, get scratched or dented.

However, there are also downsides:

- Transferring the bakeware to the oven when it's filled with heavy raw ingredients can be difficult because some of the silicone is very floppy. In fact, manufacturers recommend placing silicone bakeware on a metal baking sheet to keep things stable.
- It can be expensive. A typical muffin pan cost from \$15 to \$50 — much more than standard metal or even non-stick bakeware.
- While it's non-stick, most brands still need to be greased with every use to ensure the baked items come out easily.

## Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.

### JAMIE OLIVER PROFESSIONAL SERIES BY TEFAL

Muffin mould (six)

Price: \$49.95

#### GOOD POINTS

- Equal best for cooking.
- Easy to clean and stack in the dishwasher.
- Needs initial greasing, but then not unless it's washed in the dishwasher or you're cooking with very little fat.
- Firm handles make the pan easier to carry when filled with raw ingredients.

#### BAD POINTS

- Expensive.
- Water marks noticeable after use.



### WILTSHIRE BEND 'N' BAKE **BEST BUY**

Muffin pan (six)

Price: \$14.99

Round cake pan, 23 cm

Price: \$15.99

Baking sheet

Price: \$10.99

#### GOOD POINTS

- Equal best for cooking.
- Reasonably priced.

#### BAD POINTS

- The ridges in the base of the round pan can be difficult to clean.
- No firm handle area.
- Water marks noticeable after use.



## WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The silicone near the handles of both **PYREX** muffin pans in our test started to split, which is why **PYREX** isn't in the *What to buy* list despite its high overall score. See the photo, far right.
- The **BREVILLE** round cake pan was more difficult to clean than other brands. It has ridges on the base, and it also needs to be soaked before it goes in the dishwasher.
- All the other brands cook well, but they're either more expensive or not as easy to use as those in the *What to buy* list.

## For people with a disability

Silicone bakeware may not be suitable for some people with a disability such as hand weakness or the use of only one hand. Two hands are needed to transfer the bakeware to the oven or onto a tray.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- As silicone has a tendency to be soft and floppy it can be difficult to handle when filled with heavy raw ingredients. Look and feel for firm handles that give you a lot more stability, and thicker silicone that provides better support.
- A glossy interior is easier to clean.

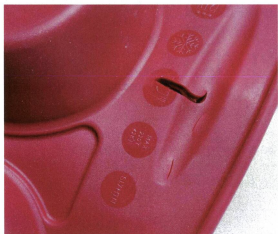
| Brand / model (in rank order)     | PERFORMANCE         |                     |                         | FEATURES          |               |            | SPECIFICATIONS        |                  |         |                            |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------|----------------------------|
|                                   | 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Cooking score (%) | 3 Ease of use score (%) | Greasing required | 4 Flexibility | 5 Handles* | Oven-safe temperature | Warranty (years) | Origin  | Manufacturer / distributor |
| <b>JAMIE OLIVER BY TEFAL</b>      | 84                  | 100                 | 80                      | ✓ (B)             | Firm          | ✓          | 250°C                 | ns               | Italy   | Tefal                      |
| <b>PYREX</b> Flexi Grips Bakeware | 83                  | 95                  | 80                      | ✓                 | Firm          | ✓          | 220°C                 | 10               | China   | World Kitchen Australia    |
| <b>TUPPERWARE</b>                 | 78                  | 100                 | 72                      | ✓                 | Firm          | ✓          | 220°C                 | 'Lifetime'       | Belgium | Tupperware                 |
| <b>SILICONE ZONE (A)</b>          | 74                  | 100                 | 68                      | ✓                 | Floppy        |            | 220°C                 | 'Lifetime'       | China   | (A)                        |
| <b>WILTSHIRE</b> Bend 'n' bake    | 74                  | 100                 | 68                      | ✓                 | Floppy        | ✓          | 220°C                 | 3                | China   | McPherson's Houseware      |
| <b>WONDERFLEX</b>                 | 74                  | 100                 | 68                      | ✓                 | Floppy (C)    |            | 230°C                 | (F)              | Italy   | Tomkin                     |
| <b>FLEX</b>                       | 70                  | 93                  | 64                      | ✓                 | Floppy        | ✓          | 300°C                 | 20               | China   | Flex Silicone Bakeware     |
| <b>BAKERS SECRET</b>              | 68                  | 100                 | 60                      | ✓                 | (D)           |            | 315°C                 | (G)              | China   | World Kitchen              |
| <b>WILLOW</b>                     | 68                  | 100                 | 60                      | ✓                 | Very floppy   |            | 230°C                 | ns               | China   | Willow Ware                |
| <b>BREVILLE</b>                   | 60                  | 93                  | 52                      | ✓                 | Very floppy   | (E)        | 240°C                 | ns               | China   | Breville                   |

## BAKER'S TIP

When you're baking muffins or cakes in a silicone pan, try leaving them in the pan to cool down a little longer than you would with a traditional metal tin, say 15 minutes. This should help your baked goodies come out of the pan with even less chance of sticking and damage.



Rigid handles help you pick up the bakeware when it's full of raw ingredients. As an alternative the Wonderflex cake tin has a reinforcing ring.



Splits in the Pyrex muffin pans made us concerned about their durability.

| RANK AND PRICE                           |                          |                             |  |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Muffin pan<br>(number of<br>cups / \$**) | Round pan<br>(cm / \$**) | Baking sheet<br>(cm / \$**) |  |
| 1 / 49.95                                | na                       | na                          |  |
| 2 / 34.95                                | 23 / 29.95 (H)           | na                          |  |
| 3 / 46.95                                | na                       | 35 x 31 / 46.95             |  |
| 4 / 19.95                                | 25 / 34.95               | 31 x 23 / 19.95             |  |
| 5 / 14.99                                | 23 / 15.99               | 35 x 25 / 10.99             |  |
| 6 / 29.95                                | 24 / 37.95               | na                          |  |
| 7 / 19.99                                | 23 / 22.99               | na                          |  |
| 8 / 9.87                                 | 22 / 9.87                | na                          |  |
| 9 / 24.99                                | 23 / 19.99               | na                          |  |

\* None of the baking sheets has a handle.

\*\* Manufacturers' recommended retail prices, June 2006.

na Not applicable.

ns Not stated.

(A) The distributor is changing and wasn't known at the time of publication; we can't say how availability or price will be affected.

(B) See the profile, above left.

(C) Round pan has a reinforcing ring for support.

(D) We only tested a baking sheet for this brand, and they're very floppy in all brands.

(E) Round cake pan only, not

muffin pan.

(F) "Six to 12 months if it's deemed a manufacturing fault."

(G) Indefinite warranty period: if the product is deemed faulty, it will be replaced or repaired — "no questions asked".

(H) To be discontinued and replaced with a "deep round cake pan"; you might still find the cake pan we tested in some stores.

### 1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Cooking: 20%
- Ease of use: 80%

Since all the cooking scores were excellent, we gave the highest weighting to ease of use in order to differentiate the products.

### 2 Cooking score

Our CHOICE home economist cooked sponge cakes in the round cake pans, muffins in the muffin pans and focaccia on the baking sheet (not all brands have all three types of bakeware). She then assessed the quality of the baked goods.

### 3 Ease of use score

This is made up of:

- Cleaning/dishwasher: 40%
- Storage and stackability: 20%
- Ease of transferring to and removing from the oven: 40%

### 4 Flexibility

We assessed the firmness of the muffin pans and cake pans for each brand. All baking sheets are intended for use with a flat metal baking tray, and it's often recommended for the other bakeware too.

### 5 Handles

Not all the muffin and cake pans have a specific firm handle area.

## Choosing GE-free

It seems it's getting easier to choose food in Australia that hasn't been genetically engineered, according to the new Greenpeace *True Food Guide*. Even the big food companies are realising that many consumers prefer GE-free food, with half of the top 50 food companies in Australia implementing GE-free policies.

The latest big food company to adopt such a policy is Campbell Amott's, which joins Heinz Wattleys, Unilever and National Foods as companies in the top 10 not using genetically engineered ingredients in their products.

If you'd like to find out which companies are GE-free and which aren't, you can download the *True Food Guide* at [www.truefood.org.au](http://www.truefood.org.au), or ask your local healthfood store if it has copies.



## Big plan to combat obesity

Australian federal and state health ministers have announced a national action agenda to address the increasing number of Australians who are overweight or obese. The new plan complements two programs already in place, the Australian Better Health Initiative and the Healthy Weight 2008 program, which is targeted at children and young people. You may have already noticed the 'Get moving' ad campaign encouraging kids to get more active, which follows on from the 'Go for 2 fruit and 5 veg' campaign.

Ministers have asked the food industry to work with the National Obesity Taskforce to develop and promote healthier options, including low-fat and low-salt products, as well as to provide better health information on labels. An expansion of a voluntary code of conduct for marketing has also been suggested, to include marketing food products to children.

A national food categorisation system, based on the nutrient criteria of food, will also be developed as the basis of national healthy school canteen guidelines.

The agenda is certainly a step in the right direction, although CHOICE would like to see stronger regulation of advertising, such as banning the advertising of unhealthy food products in children's viewing times. We'll keep you posted.

## Comparing apples and oranges

We're always told to eat at least two serves of fruit and five serves of vegies a day, but what exactly constitutes a serve? A single strawberry hardly equates to an orange as a serve of fruit. Here are some examples of serve sizes, as outlined by the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*.

One serve of fruit equals:

- One medium piece — for example, one medium apple, pear or banana.
- Two small pieces, such as two plums, kiwi fruit or apricots.
- One cup (250 mL) of diced fruit pieces or canned fruit.
- Half a cup of fruit juice (not equivalent to fruit, so should only replace one serve a day).
- Dried fruit — four apricot halves or 1½ tablespoons sultanas.

One serve of vegetables equals:

- ½ cup cooked vegetables.
- ½ cup cooked beans, peas or lentils.
- One cup of salad vegetables.
- One medium-size potato.





# Two by two

Side-by-side or tandem ...  
does the shape of a double  
stroller make a difference?

If you've got twins — or a baby and a toddler close in age — a two-seater stroller could be just what you need for getting everyone from A to B. Most of the tested models cost around the same as single-seat models of the same brand, and will comfortably transport two kids, a nappy bag and bottles, and maybe even some groceries. Unfortunately, life might be less comfortable for the adult doing the pushing; double strollers are bigger and bulkier than single-seaters and can be hard work to push around.

## SIDE-BY-SIDE OR TANDEM?

Double strollers have similar features to their single-seat counterparts. One major difference is that none of the tested models has reversible handles; presumably these are too hard to incorporate in a double stroller. There are four-wheel (or in some cases, six-wheel) models and jogger-style models with three or four wheels, though you'd have to be very fit to go jogging with any of these.

Double strollers generally come in one of two basic designs:

■ **Side-by-sides** have the two seats next to each other. This makes it easier to see both children at once, but makes the stroller quite wide and in some cases difficult to fit through doorways and narrow supermarket aisles. They can take up a fair amount of space on footpaths too. The side-by-side models on test ranged in width from 73 to 83 cm, compared to 48 to 62 cm in our most recent test of single strollers (CHOICE, May 2006). On all the tested side-by-side models both seats can recline independently, making them suitable for either two babies, two toddlers or one of each.



Babies under six months shouldn't be placed in a stroller seat unless the backrest can be reclined more than 130° to the seat. All the seats on the tested side-by-side models recline far enough to suit young babies.

■ **Tandems** have one seat in front of the other. This keeps the stroller narrow; the tandem models on test ranged in width from 52 to 57 cm, similar to many single-seat models. However, although they can be easier to get through a doorway, their length means

## IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: nine double strollers, including six side-by-side and three tandem models, ranging from \$159 to \$1139.
- None failed our durability tests, but one failed safety tests.
- They're bulky and can be hard to steer.

## WHAT TO BUY

|                                        |        |
|----------------------------------------|--------|
| BABY CLUB Twin Jupiter                 | \$159  |
| BABYLOVE Tandem Light BL7241           | \$369  |
| LOVE N CARE Twin Cruiser BP4360*       | \$249  |
| MOUNTAIN BUGGY Double Urban GU2204-861 | \$1139 |

\* Discontinued but may still be available in some shops.



you could have trouble reaching the door to open it; you'd probably have to back in through the door and pull the stroller after you. The larger side-by-side models can present the same problem.

Their extra length can also make them harder to steer — our tester said steering a tandem stroller felt like trying to drive a car from the back seat. Their length and weight can also make it difficult to get the stroller up a step or kerb by pushing down on the rear handle, though this can also be true for some side-by-side models. And it's a bit harder to keep an eye on the child seated up front.

The back seats of all the tandem-style strollers recline far enough for a baby under six months, but only the **BABYLOVE** and **SWALLOW** have front seats that also recline far enough to make the stroller suitable if you have young twins.

### THE VERDICT

We tested the strollers for safety and durability. We also assessed how easy they are to use by putting them through their paces in real-life situations, such as steering them through doorways, up and down stairs and loading them into a car.

The good news is that none of the tested models failed any durability tests. However, the **PEG PEREGO Aria Twin** failed safety tests, and none scored well for ease of use, partly due to their size and weight. They were considerably harder to manoeuvre, fold, unfold and carry than single-seat strollers. For details, see the profiles and *What about the rest*, right.

## Profiles

Models in the *What to buy list*

### BABY CLUB TWIN JUPITER

Price: \$159

Type: Side-by-side

#### GOOD POINTS

- The cheapest stroller in the *What to buy list*.

#### BAD POINTS

- The seat recline mechanism isn't easy to reach and use, especially when one or both seats are fully reclined.
- No front bar; see *Features*, page 38



### WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The **CHILDCARE**, **JEEP**, **STEELCRAFT** and **SWALLOW** strollers are also worth considering. They passed all safety and durability tests, but didn't score quite as well for ease of use as the recommended models.

- Their seat harnesses aren't as easy to reach and use as those on the recommended models.
- The **CHILDCARE**'s seat recline mechanism is hard to reach and use, its swivel wheel locks are also hard to reach, and it feels very heavy and unbalanced to carry when folded.
- The **JEEP** feels very heavy to lift when folded and is hard to manoeuvre, especially over rough ground and when turning tight corners.
- The **STEELCRAFT**'s seat recline mechanism is hard to reach and use, and it's quite hard to fold up.
- The brakes on the **SWALLOW** aren't easy to use, and it also feels heavy and is hard to manoeuvre

phabetical order.

### **BABYLOVE TANDEM LIGHT BL7241**

Price: \$369

Type: Tandem

#### **GOOD POINTS**

- Linked rear brakes.
- Bottom basket has a stiffening board to prevent sagging.

#### **BAD POINTS**

- Extremely difficult to manoeuvre around a tight corner.



over rough ground and through tight corners.

- The PEG PEREGO is the easiest to use, but was let down by failing a couple of safety tests. It doesn't have an effective head barrier to prevent a baby slipping out the top end of the stroller when the seat is fully reclined; and the foot opening between the front bar and the seat is too small, so an unsecured child could slip down through the foot opening and get their head trapped. However, harnessing the children properly in the stroller would reduce the risk of this happening. Although the Aria Twin doesn't carry a claim to meet the Australian standard, the distributor supplied us with a test report showing that it did, at least at the time of the test report.

### **LOVE N CARE TWIN CRUISER BP436D**

Price: \$249

Type: Side-by-side

#### **GOOD POINTS**

- Linked rear brakes.
- Large inflatable tyres, which are better over rough ground (but no tyre pump).
- Comes with a leg cover.
- One rear and two side pockets.

#### **BAD POINTS**

- The crotch strap can be separated from the buckle and inadvertently left unattached to the rest of the harness.
- The widest model on test; it can be especially difficult to get through narrow doorways.
- Bottom basket not easy to access.



### **MOUNTAIN BUGGY DOUBLE URBAN GU2204-861**

Price: \$1139

Type: Side-by-side

#### **GOOD POINTS**

- Linked rear brakes.
- Adjustable handle height.
- Large inflatable tyres (a tyre pump is provided).
- Two side pockets on the canopy, plus more at the back of the bottom basket.
- Has a leash to attach it to your hand or wrist so it won't roll away.

#### **BAD POINTS**

- Expensive.
- No front bar.
- Crotch strap length isn't adjustable.



## **Standard certification**

Most of the tested models are labelled as complying with the voluntary Australian/New Zealand stroller standard, AS/NZS 2088:2000. Only the JEEP and PEG PEREGO didn't carry this claim. All the models that were labelled as passing the standard also passed our tests, as did the JEEP.

This is encouraging. It's the first time in a long while that we've had a good result like this in a baby product test. In several previous tests of baby products we've found that manufacturer claims that a product meets the standard can't be taken as a completely reliable indication that it really does. For example, variations during manufacture can lead to some samples of a product passing the standard tests, while others fail. Certification marks and claims are worth looking for, but use the information in this article as well when buying a stroller.

## What to look for

### ESSENTIALS

■ **Type.** Tandem or side-by-side? If you've got two newborns, you'll need both seats to be fully reclinable, meaning some tandems won't be suitable. See *Side-by-side or tandem?*, page 35, for details of the tested models. Otherwise, it's a matter of personal preference. Try different types in the store — with the children in them, if possible — to get the feel of which is best for you.

■ **Weight, size and width.** Unsurprisingly, double strollers tend to be heavier than single strollers. The strollers in this test

ranged in weight from just over 8 kg to nearly 16, compared to a range of just over 7 kg to nearly 13 in our last single stroller test (CHOICE, May 2006). The lighter the stroller, the easier it is to carry up and down stairs or on buses and trains. Double strollers also tend to be very bulky, even when folded; you'd need a large car boot to fit most of the tested models.

■ **Handle.** Check the handle to make sure it feels comfortable to grip. If you're particularly short or tall, you may need a model with adjustable handle height.

■ **Swivel wheels** at the front make steering easier. All the tested models have lockable swivel front wheels. The locks should be within easy reach of your foot.

■ **Brakes.** Some strollers have individual brakes on each wheel; others have brakes linked by a bar, so you only push down on one mechanism to activate them.

■ **Harness.** Look for a five-point harness on each seat (two shoulder straps attached to the backrest at shoulder level, a waist strap and a crotch strap). The waist strap in particular should be securely linked to the stroller's frame, so the child can't lean out and tilt the stroller. Give the harness a tug to check the seat doesn't pull away from the frame. Make sure the straps are easy to adjust and the buckles easy to fasten and unfasten (for you, not your child).

### FEATURES

■ All the tested strollers have a **canopy or hood** on both seats, which is sometimes detachable, to protect your child from sun or rain.

■ A **front bumper bar or tray** acts as a barrier and provides a hand-grip for the child. It's often detachable, so don't use it to lift the stroller. For tandem models, a bar is less important



*Bigger wheels tend to be better than smaller ones over rough ground, kerbs and stairs. However, they can also be harder to fit into a car boot. Some models have inflatable tyres, which are good at absorbing jolts and bumps, but you'll need to adjust the tyre pressure occasionally with a tyre pump. Of the tested models, the Love n Care and Mountain Buggy have inflatable tyres, though only the Mountain Buggy comes with a tyre pump.*

Brand / model  
(in order of ease of use, within groups)

#### 1 Passed all safety and durability tests

|                                          |    |  |              |            |            |          |                  |          |       |
|------------------------------------------|----|--|--------------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|----------|-------|
| BABY CLUB Twin Jupiter                   | 55 |  | Side-by-side | Individual |            | 4        | 2                | ✓        | ✓     |
| BABYLOVE Tandem Light BL7241             | 55 |  | Tandem       | Linked     | Bar (C)    | 3 / 4    | 1                | ✓ (C)    | ✓ (F) |
| LOVE N CARE Twin Cruiser BP436D (A)      | 55 |  | Side-by-side | Linked     | Bar (D)    | Variable | 1                |          | ✓     |
| MOUNTAIN BUGGY Double Urban GU2204-861   | 55 |  | Side-by-side | ✓          | Linked     | Variable | 1                | ✓        | ✓     |
| CHILDCARE Twin Espree Lite 019107-080    | 50 |  | Side-by-side | ✓          | Individual | Bar      | 5                | Variable | ✓     |
| JEEP Wagoneer Limited                    | 50 |  | Tandem       |            | Individual | Tray     | Variable / 2 (E) | 1        | ✓ (C) |
| STEELCRAFT Duo Twin 36705                | 50 |  | Side-by-side |            | Individual |          | 5                | 2        | ✓     |
| SWALLOW Litelimo & Co                    | 50 |  | Tandem       |            | Individual | Bar (C)  | 2 / 3            | 1        | ✓     |
| Not recommended: Failed safety tests (B) |    |  |              |            |            |          |                  |          |       |
| PEG PEREGO Aria Twin                     | 65 |  | Side-by-side |            | Individual | Tray     | Variable         | 1        | ✓     |



A basket or tray underneath the stroller should be easily accessible when the seats are in both upright and reclining positions, roomy enough to hold a few essentials and deep enough to stop items falling out (see the photo right). The tested models have either one large basket or two smaller ones (one under each seat). Don't overload them or the stroller may become unstable and hard to move.

on the rear seat as the front seat acts as a barrier.

■ The **backrest** of both seats on all the side-by-side models and two of the tandems can either be upright or fully reclined (the recommended position for babies under six months or for sleeping toddlers). Most can also be semi-reclined in one or more fixed positions; some have a **variable** adjustment allowing any position.

■ An adjustable **legrest** and **footrest** help accommodate your child's growth, as well as keeping your child's feet clear of the ground and wheels.

■ A **boot or leg cover** is a bag-like attachment you pull over the bottom of the stroller to protect your child's legs from rain, sun or cold. For side-by-side models, this can be a single cover that accommodates both children.

■ A **raincover** is designed to protect your child in wet weather. It's usually an optional extra.

*Pockets, pouches or a tray on the back or sides of the stroller are useful for holding small items like keys or a purse.*



\* For both seats on side-by-side models, or front/rear for tandems. Seats can be reclined independently on all tested models.

\*\* All models with a rain cover can be folded with it still on.

† Including supplied accessories, rounded to the nearest 0.1 kg.

†† Maximum dimensions when in use, rounded up to the next cm.

‡ Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in May/June 2006, unless indicated otherwise.

(A) Discontinued, but you might still find it in some stores.

(B) See What about the rest?, page 36.

(C) For front seat only.

(D) One bar for both seats.

(E) Front seat unsuitable for a child under six months.

(F) For rear seat only.

(G) Plus five pockets on the bottom basket.

(H) The price we paid in January 2006.

## 1 Safety and durability

We tested the strollers for safety and durability against selected clauses of the Australian standard (AS/NZS 2088:2000).

## 2 Ease of use

We assessed the ease of use, looking at the following aspects:

- Adjusting and securing the harnesses.
- Reclining the seats.
- Adjusting the leg and foot rests.
- Adjusting the handle height.
- Applying and releasing the brakes.
- Locking the swivel wheels.
- Accessing the bottom storage baskets.
- Folding and unfolding the stroller.
- Carrying the stroller and loading/unloading it from a car boot.
- Manoeuvring around a course including doorways, stairs, corners, footpaths and rough ground.

## 3 Features

- See What to look for, above left, for more on these.

|                      |           |              | SPECIFICATIONS |                              |          |                  |             |                            |                          |
|----------------------|-----------|--------------|----------------|------------------------------|----------|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Seats (hood & sides) | Leg cover | Rain cover** | Weight (kg)†   | Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)†† |          | Warranty (years) | Origin      | Manufacturer / distributor | Price (\$)‡              |
| (G)                  | ✓         |              | 13.2           | 107                          | 73 x 84  | Not stated       | China       | Target                     | 159                      |
|                      |           |              | 13.7           | 101                          | 52 x 123 | 1                | China       | BabyLove                   | 369                      |
|                      |           |              | 14.6           | 101                          | 83 x 131 | 1                | China       | Love N Care                | 249 (H)                  |
|                      | ✓         | ✓            | 15.9           | 108                          | 73 x 143 | 1                | New Zealand | Mountain Buggy             | 1139                     |
|                      |           |              | 15.4           | 112                          | 75 x 95  | 1                | China       | C O White                  | 300                      |
|                      |           |              | 15.4           | 115                          | 52 x 140 | 1                | China       | Born with Style            | 440                      |
|                      | ✓         |              | 12.3           | 107                          | 77 x 91  | 1                | China       | Britax                     | 229                      |
|                      |           |              | 13.1           | 101                          | 57 x 120 | 1                | China       | Swallow / BabyCo           | 299                      |
|                      |           |              |                | 8.3                          | 101      | 77 x 87          | Not stated  | Italy                      | Housewares International |

Solar-powered garden lights are an easy way to mark your garden path at night, but they're far from bright.

# How does your garden glow?

## IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 11 solar-powered garden lights priced from \$10 to \$54.
- They're all easy to install, but they vary a lot in performance: some stay lit nearly all night, others only last a few hours.
- None is particularly powerful; if you want a more brightly lit garden, go for a mains-powered 12 volt system instead.

## WHAT TO BUY

**OUTDOOR ELEMENTS** Pathway Solar Light KM1011A

\$13

None of the other lights worked nearly as well, being let down by either their battery life or their light intensity (or both).



Brand / model (in rank order)

**OUTDOOR ELEMENTS** Pathway Solar Light KM1011A

**ARCHITEC** Solar Tierlight RSL12

**PATIO BY JAMIE DURIE** Tiered Lantern Solar Light 38-406-027

**RINGGRIP** Tierlight RSL5

**HPM** Solar Accent Victorian Postlight RSLVH1

**RINGGRIP** Japanese Style Solar Light RJSSL3

**SOLARLIGHT** 3-Tier Solar Lamp 3T-D100

**THE GREEN GARDENER** Stainless Steel Solar Light 13548

**HPM** Solar Accent Newport Bollard

**SOLA SCAPE** Solar Garden Lights RSLBSSP4 (pack of 4)

**THE GREEN GARDENER** Solar Light 13549 (pack of 2)

## PERFORMANCE

| 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Battery life score (%) |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 88                  | 95                       |
| 69                  | 85                       |
| 62                  | 75                       |
| 54                  | 55                       |
| 48                  | 55                       |
| 48                  | 55                       |
| 46                  | 35                       |
| 43                  | 40                       |
| 36                  | 30                       |
| 34                  | 35                       |
| 34                  | 35                       |

**D**o you want your garden to glow at night? Mark out a winding pathway, highlight a flower bed, or even shed some light on your shed? A few solar-powered lights could seem a simple solution. They have a solar panel on top to charge their batteries and a sensor to activate the light when night falls. The light then shines until either dawn comes or the battery runs down.

And there lie the two problems we found with nearly all these lights: most batteries run out while it's still dark, and most lights are too dim to be much use at all.

## THE BRIGHTEST SPARKS

However, the **OUTDOOR ELEMENTS** Pathway Solar Light was an exception, and the clear winner: on average, it stayed lit for over 11 hours each night. Its life was fairly consistent regardless of weather and it was among the brightest of the tested models.

A higher price doesn't mean better performance — the **OUTDOOR ELEMENTS** was one of the cheapest on test. More expensive models might be more stylish, but don't necessarily light up longer or brighter. And having two batteries also doesn't guarantee better light; you'll find twin-battery models both at the top and bottom of the table.

Unsurprisingly, all the lights lasted longest after the sunniest days. Although some lights died significantly faster after cloudy days, the better models showed only a small dip in battery life.

None of the tested models gives out very bright light. They're about as bright as moonlight — at

least for the small area they actually light up — so they're best suited to mood or accent lighting. They're OK for marking a pathway as long as the ground is fairly even and the light can be positioned to catch plenty of sunlight.

However, if the area is heavily shaded so the solar light can't fully charge, or if it's uneven enough to require brighter lighting, we suggest installing a mains-powered 12 volt system instead. For comparison, we checked the light output of a 12 volt garden light system (priced around \$32, including four lights, transformer and cables) and found it was more than five times brighter than the best solar light tested.

All the tested models are extremely easy to set up. In most cases, it's just a matter of pushing the supplied stake into the ground, attaching the light fitting, and (if it has an on/off switch) turning it on.



*Most solar lights are of a similar style, but there were a few different designs among the ones we tested.*

|                           | FEATURES           |                    |                     | SPECIFICATIONS |                     |                              |                |  |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Light intensity<br>re (%) | On / off<br>switch | Colour<br>of light | No. of<br>batteries | Height<br>(cm) | Warranty<br>(years) | Manufacturer/<br>distributor | Price<br>(\$)* |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 2                   | 28             | 1                   | Kmart                        | 13             |  |
| ■                         |                    | White              | 1                   | 33             | 2                   | Ringrip                      | 54             |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 2                   | 35             | ns                  | Kmart                        | 29             |  |
| ■                         |                    | White              | 1                   | 32             | 2                   | Ringrip                      | 15             |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 1                   | 36             | 1                   | HPM Industries               | 20             |  |
| ■                         |                    | Yellow             | 2                   | 30             | 2                   | Ringrip                      | 50             |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 2                   | 26             | ns                  | Big W                        | 10             |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 2                   | 26             | ns                  | Woolworths                   | 15             |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 2                   | 37             | 2                   | HPM Industries               | 40             |  |
| ■                         |                    | White              | 1                   | 30             | ns                  | HPM Industries               | 30 (A)         |  |
| ■                         | ✓                  | White              | 2                   | 28             | ns                  | Woolworths                   | 17 (A)         |  |

All models were made in China.  
ns Not stated.

\* This is the price we paid in April 2006.  
(A) Price per pack.

### 1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Battery life: 70%
- Light intensity: 30%

The tests were done in autumn; obviously a test in summer could give better results due to longer days with more intense sunlight. But you want your garden lights to work well all year round; you might need them even more in autumn and winter when night falls earlier.

Ease of use wasn't scored, as all the tested lights are very easy to install and use.

### 2 Battery life score

After an initial charging period of 48 hours of sunshine to ensure the batteries were fully charged, we put the lights outside in the sun for nine

days of at least eight hours each. At night we brought them inside and electronically measured how long they stayed lit, up to a maximum of 12 hours.

This score is a measure of how long the light stayed lit at night after a full day's charge, averaged across the nine nights. A score of 95% means the light stayed on for about 11.5 hours; 55% indicates about 6.5 hours of light, and 30% indicates just under four hours.

### 3 Light intensity score

This is a measure of how bright each light was. It was judged in a completely dark room after the lights had had at least eight hours' exposure to sun.

# Brush up your maths

Some students find maths interesting and challenging; others find the concepts more difficult. That's where tutorial software comes in.

These products make claims such as "play the most absorbing, amazing and mind bending maths games ever invented" and "guaranteed 80% improvement within four weeks", so *Computer CHOICE* recently asked the University of Melbourne Faculty of Education to find out whether nine maths tutorial programs live up to their claims.

## ON TEST

(in alphabetical order)

|                                         |       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|
| ■ COMPUTER CLASSROOM Maths at Home      | \$20  |
| ■ KID'S MATHS QUEST Ages 8-14+          | \$10  |
| ■ MATHS MADE EASY 6                     | \$30  |
| ■ NUMBER FACTS Ages 9-12                | \$20  |
| ■ NUMBERS UP! 2 Baggin' the Dragon      | \$100 |
| ■ NUMERACY BANK 6                       | \$65  |
| ■ ULTIMATE AUSSIE MATHS INVADERS        | \$100 |
| ■ WINDY TOWERS Maths Mayhem             | \$33  |
| ■ YOUNG EINSTEIN MATHS For Years 1 to 8 | \$70  |

## FUN AND EDUCATIONAL?

We chose programs that can be bought from retail stores rather than those that sell through websites or door-to-door. They cater for upper primary to lower secondary students and take various approaches to making maths interesting and challenging. Some use lots of tasks that repeat problems in slightly different ways; others emphasise games and animation, with almost incidental maths activities.

## WHAT TO BUY

**Numbers Up! 2 Baggin' the Dragon** \$100\*

\* The price we paid in March 2006.

The experts found **BAGGIN' THE DRAGON** fun to use and it covers a range of topics. It doesn't attempt direct teaching but offers excellent opportunities for practice, application and extension of a variety of maths skills and knowledge. It's suitable for both remedial work and extending talented students with a high degree of engagement.



GENE ROSS



There's often a fine line between educational content and keeping kids interested. One danger is that students may lose interest in programs that focus too much on maths content. But too much fun and too little maths won't be very helpful either. Programs with explanations, practice exercises and engaging game play should provide a happy middle ground.

The claims made on the packaging are often exaggerated and you should treat them as a broad guide only, because the standard of maths for expected age/year levels varies greatly from product to product. Price isn't necessarily an indication of educational value, either — and prices ranged from \$10–100.

Instead, consider the way maths is taught in your child's classroom. Best results are obtained when a student doesn't have to deal with different ways of learning how to solve the same problem.

## TOPICS AND EXERCISES

Some programs focus on a particular topic, such as numeracy (what many of us call arithmetic). Others cover various topics, with the student asked to deal with a range of problems within each topic.

The best programs let you choose the level at which to begin and allow you to move up and down levels as required. This control is helpful because you can choose a level to suit the skill of the student. A remedial student may start at a slightly lower level, for example, and work their way through the levels, gaining practice and confidence along the way. Similarly, talented students can extend their knowledge and skill.

Also check that your computer can work with the software. Some programs had trouble with Mac operating systems.

*Computer CHOICE*, July/August 2006, has full test results and specifications. If you'd like to subscribe go to [www.choice.com.au/magazines](http://www.choice.com.au/magazines) or call 1800 069 552 toll-free.



Speed, size, features ...

# Simple choices

Even though many people mainly use their dryer in the colder and wetter months rather than all year round, more than half of Australian households have a dryer in the laundry.

Clothes dryers are pretty simple machines that really have only one task, and you can expect most dryers to do it well. So choosing comes down to how long you're prepared to wait for dry clothes and whether the features they have suit you.

## CHOOSING AND USING

We assessed eight new dryers ranging in capacity from 4 kg to 8 kg. They're all standard vented dryers (they blow out the hot, damp air), not condenser dryers, which condense out and collect the water extracted from your clothes (they're generally more expensive).

How you use your dryer — as a rainy day option or constant laundry companion — will determine whether certain features are worth paying for (*What to consider* on page 44 lists some of them). For example, you might prefer a machine that can detect moisture in the load and stop or keep running accordingly, saving you constant checking. If you have children, though, drying time and capacity may be more important to you than fancy features.

The ease of use of products can sometimes be an issue, but all the newly assessed dryers — the MIELE T 4124, the new SIMPSON and WESTINGHOUSE models and the F&P DEIX1 — are extremely easy to use. They outscore all the previously assessed models for ease of using controls and accessing and cleaning the filter. Part of the reason for this is that the new SIMPSON and WESTINGHOUSE dryers no longer have their filter at the back of the drum, which brought down their scores in the past.

## ENTER THE INNOVATION

At a glance, you might think the FISHER & PAYKEL DEIX1 is a top-loading washing machine. In fact it's a top-loading dryer — and a large 8 kg one at that.



CERE ROSS

## WHAT TO BUY

The *What to buy* list includes the best models in each size bracket, and of these, **Best Buys** are the cheapest to buy and run.

### Less than 5 kg

|                        |                   |       |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| SIMPSON 39P400M        | ◀ <b>BEST BUY</b> | \$389 |
| FISHER AND PAYKEL ED56 |                   | \$589 |

### 5 kg to 7 kg

|                                   |                   |        |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--------|
| MIELE T 4124                      |                   | \$1699 |
| SIMPSON 39S500M                   | ◀ <b>BEST BUY</b> | \$479  |
| SIMPSON 39S600M                   |                   | \$569  |
| WESTINGHOUSE Complete Care LD500B | ◀ <b>BEST BUY</b> | \$519  |

### More than 7 kg

|                       |  |        |
|-----------------------|--|--------|
| FISHER & PAYKEL DEIX1 |  | \$1499 |
|-----------------------|--|--------|

## IN A NUTSHELL:

- Results for 15 dryers, from \$389 to \$1899.
- Enter the innovation: a top-loading dryer.

The clothes still spin about a horizontal axis, but the opening is in the side of the drum, rather than the front. It looks a little like a lottery barrel when you first open the lid. Fortunately, it's designed so that the drum opening always greets you when you lift the lid and you load and unload clothes as with a top-loading washing machine.

Aside from its unusual design, the **FISHER & PAYKEL DE1X** was the best overall performer in any size range and with a two-star energy rating, it's one of the more energy-efficient dryers overall.

## SPECIAL TREATMENT

At 9 kg and 8 kg respectively, the two **MAYTAG** models and the **FISHER & PAYKEL DE1X** are not only big inside but require the right amount of space in your laundry — nearly 10 cm more width and 20 cm greater depth than smaller-capacity dryers.

They also require a special mains circuit — the **FISHER & PAYKEL** needs a 30 amp power outlet and the **MAYTAG** models a 20 amp outlet. Most household power points are only rated to deliver 10 amps. So if you're thinking of buying one of these you'll need to

consider the additional time, effort and cost of wiring in a 30 or 20 amp circuit.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER

### Size

Because size is often the first decision step, we've divided the dryers into three size ranges:

- Less than 5 kg.
- 5–7 kg.
- Over 7 kg.

While they're energy-efficient, larger dryers still of course use more energy overall — and they're more expensive to buy.

### Controls

- Some dryers have a timer you set manually, while others have a sensor that detects when the load has reached a preset dryness level and automatically switches off. Some auto-sensing dryers have a manual timer as well.
- Controls can involve dials, pushbuttons, electronic pushbuttons and touch-sensor pads, or some combination of these. The **MAYTAG Neptune** is unique

## Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within groups.



LESS THAN 5 KG

### SIMPSON 39P400m

Price: \$389 **BEST BUY**  
GOOD POINTS

- Comparatively good drying time for this capacity.
- Can be wall-mounted (including upside-down) and the mounting kit is supplied
- Reverse tumbling.

### BAD POINTS

- No drying rack available.



### FISHER & PAYKEL ED56

Price: \$589  
GOOD POINTS

- Best energy efficiency for this capacity (but see footnote (A), page 47).
- Wall-mountable (including upside-down), with the fitting supplied.
- Reverse tumbling

### BAD POINTS

- Comparatively long cycle time and high running costs for this size range.



5 KG TO 7 KG

### MIELE T 4124

Price: \$1699  
GOOD POINTS

- A wide range of sensor-drying settings.
- Good energy rating for this size range.
- Can be stacked on a MIELE washing machine.
- Internal lighting.
- Indicates the drying stage reached.
- Reverse tumbling.

### BAD POINTS

- Comparatively expensive for this size range.
- Can't be wall-mounted.
- No drying rack available.



### SIMPSON 39S500m

Price: \$479 **BEST BUY**  
GOOD POINTS

- Comparatively good drying time for this capacity.
- Comparatively cheap for this capacity.
- Can be wall-mounted (including upside-down) and the mounting kit is supplied.
- Reverse tumbling.

### BAD POINTS

- No drying rack available.

in having a touch-screen control panel in addition to conventional electronic pushbuttons.

## Filters

Dryer filters collect fluff quickly and need regular cleaning. So it's helpful if the filter is located conveniently at or near the front. This is the case with all the newly assessed machines.

## Vents/ducting

How the moist, hot air from the dryer is going to get out of your laundry is an important consideration if you don't want dripping walls and mouldy ceilings.

If you've got an exhaust fan or can put your dryer in front of a window, you may not need to worry too much, but otherwise you'll probably need a ducting kit to get the hot, wet air outside. Some dryers come with one, for others it's an optional extra. However, not all ducting kits suit all situations. If ducting will travel through an external wall, what is the wall made from? Brick? Timber? Fibro? Discuss the installation with the sales staff to make sure you get what you need.

Some dryers that have vents at the front to exhaust the air can't be ducted, making an exhaust fan or window ventilation more important. The table on page 46 notes which dryers are front-vented and whether they can be ducted.

## Wall-mounting/stacking

If limited space (or personal preference) means you're looking for a dryer that can be wall-mounted (for instance, above your washing machine), check this before you buy. Some dryers, particularly larger models, are too heavy to be wall-mounted. You'll also need to consider the nature and strength of the wall you're planning to use, and ensure you have suitable fastenings and screws to secure the brackets.

A dryer that sits on top of your washing machine (called 'stacking') is also a possibility if you have a front loader. Be sure to check if it can only be stacked on a specific or matching washing machine model, or any washer.



### SIMPSON 39S600M

Price: \$569

#### GOOD POINTS

- Comparatively good drying time for this capacity.
- Can be wall-mounted (including upside-down) and the kit is supplied.
- Reverse tumbling.

#### BAD POINTS

- No drying rack available.

### WESTINGHOUSE COMPLETE CARE LD500B

Price: \$519

**BEST BUY**

#### GOOD POINTS

- Comparatively good drying time for this capacity.
- Can be wall-mounted (including upside-down) and the mounting kit is supplied.
- Reverse tumbling.

#### BAD POINTS

- No drying rack available.

### MORE THAN 7 KG

### FISHER & PAYKEL DEIX1

Price: \$1499

#### GOOD POINTS

- Pushbutton electronic controls.
- Comparatively inexpensive to run for its size.
- Reverse tumbling.

#### BAD POINTS

- Needs 30 amp power outlet.
- No drying rack available.
- Can't be stacked or wall-mounted.
- Takes up more room in your laundry.

## WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

All the dryers will dry your clothes, so choosing a model comes down to capacity, drying time, energy efficiency, features and how much you want to pay.

■ The **FISHER & PAYKEL AD55** and **AD39** are quite a lot less energy-efficient than the two small models in the *What to buy* list.

■ The **WESTINGHOUSE LD505EB** and **LD605EB** have a two-star energy rating — higher than the rest of this size range except the **MIELE**.

■ In the 5–7 kg range the **KLEENMAID KED 300** and **BOSCH Classixx** are more expensive than all but the **MIELE** that's in the *What to buy* list, and are slightly less easy to use.

■ The 9 kg **MAYTAG Neptune** is unique in having a touchscreen control panel supplemented by conventional electronic pushbuttons — the controls are very easy to use, but this machine is very expensive. The **Atlantis** is slightly cheaper, though still more expensive than the large **FISHER & PAYKEL** in the *What to buy* list.

| Brand / model (in rank order)              | PERFORMANCE         |                         |                               |                         |                        |                       | 6 FEATURES     |                            |            |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------------|------------|
|                                            | 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Ease of use score (%) | 3 Energy efficiency score (%) | 4 Drying time score (%) | 4 Cycle time (minutes) | 5 Energy rating stars | Controls       | Wall-mountable / stackable | Reversible |
| <b>LESS THAN 5 KG</b>                      |                     |                         |                               |                         |                        |                       |                |                            |            |
| # <b>SIMPSON</b> 39P400M                   | 67                  | 93                      | 53                            | 69                      | 95                     | 1.5                   | Timer          | (D) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| <b>FISHER &amp; PAYKEL</b> ED56 (A)        | 63                  | 83                      | 57                            | 59                      | 147                    | 2.0                   | Sensor (C)     | (D) / ns                   | ✓          |
| <b>FISHER &amp; PAYKEL</b> AD55            | 59                  | 85                      | 46                            | 60                      | 145                    | 1.0                   | Timer          | (D) / ns                   | ✓          |
| <b>FISHER &amp; PAYKEL</b> AD39 (B)        | 55                  | 82                      | 41                            | 56                      | 125                    | 1.0                   | Timer          | (D) / ns                   |            |
| <b>5 KG TO 7 KG</b>                        |                     |                         |                               |                         |                        |                       |                |                            |            |
| # <b>MIELE</b> T 4124                      | 70                  | 93                      | 60                            | 69                      | 120                    | 2.0                   | Sensor & timer | - / ✓                      | ✓          |
| # <b>SIMPSON</b> 39S500M                   | 68                  | 93                      | 54                            | 70                      | 117                    | 1.5                   | Timer          | (D) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| # <b>SIMPSON</b> 39S600M                   | 68                  | 93                      | 54                            | 70                      | 137                    | 1.5                   | Timer          | (D) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| # <b>WESTINGHOUSE</b> Complete Care LD500B | 68                  | 93                      | 54                            | 70                      | 117                    | 1.5                   | Timer          | (D) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| # <b>WESTINGHOUSE</b> LD505EB              | 67                  | 90                      | 56                            | 67                      | 130                    | 2.0                   | Sensor & timer | (D) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| # <b>WESTINGHOUSE</b> LD605EB              | 67                  | 90                      | 56                            | 67                      | 157                    | 2.0                   | Sensor & timer | (D) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| <b>KLEENMAID</b> KED 300                   | 65                  | 83                      | 54                            | 68                      | 126                    | 1.5                   | Timer          | (E) / ✓                    | ✓          |
| <b>BOSCH</b> classiXX WTA3003AU            | 64                  | 83                      | 53                            | 66                      | 134                    | 1.5                   | Timer          | - / ✓                      | ✓          |
| <b>LARGER THAN 7 KG</b>                    |                     |                         |                               |                         |                        |                       |                |                            |            |
| # <b>FISHER &amp; PAYKEL</b> DEIX1         | 75                  | 90                      | 59                            | 83                      | 95                     | 2.0                   | Sensor & timer | - / -                      | ✓          |
| <b>MAYTAG</b> Neptune MDE7550              | 71                  | 85                      | 53                            | 82                      | 114                    | 1.5                   | Sensor & timer | - / -                      |            |
| <b>MAYTAG</b> Atlantis MDE6400             | 71                  | 83                      | 54                            | 81                      | 117                    | 1.5                   | Sensor & timer | - / -                      |            |

## HAZARD FIXED

In our last dryers update we reported the return of a hazard — dryers automatically restarting when the door is closed after a cycle has been interrupted. If a child climbed into a dryer partway through a cycle and the door was closed, it would restart with the child inside.

In particular, we called for Electrolux, the manufacturer of a number of **SIMPSON** dryers that had this problem, to fix this safety issue with the introduction of another restart stage.

We're pleased to report that all the newly assessed dryers, including the new **SIMPSON**s, have the extra restart step.



## FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre, NSW, assessed the newly tested dryers' suitability for people with certain disabilities:

- If you're in a wheelchair, you'll find it easiest if the dryer is raised off the floor to allow easier access and operation. Of the newly assessed models, the **MIELE T 4124**, **SIMPSON 39P400M** and **WESTINGHOUSE LD605EB** are most suitable overall. They're very easy to reach into, open and clean and have easy-to-reach controls. The **SIMPSON 39S500M**, **39S600M** and **WESTINGHOUSE LD500B** and **LD505EB** may also be suitable, although they're slightly less easy to reach into.
- If you have problems with your hands, wrists or arms, look for a dryer that's easy to open and reach into, with an easy-to-use filter. The **MIELE** is most suitable overall. However, the **WESTINGHOUSE** and **SIMPSON** dryers all have very easy-to-use filters, and the **WESTINGHOUSE** models have a deeper hand-grip than the **SIMPSON**s. The **SIMPSON 39P400M** allows very easy reaching into the machine.
- If you have a vision impairment, look for a dryer with simple controls. The **MIELE** is very good in this regard, allowing you to leave the drying setting fixed — you only need to press the start and door-open buttons.
- None of the recently assessed models is especially good for those with learning issues or cognitive or memory impairment, who are helped by clear, simple controls and labels.



|                      |                             |             |                 |                     | SPECIFICATIONS |                            |           |                   |                            | COSTS                           |              |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Temperature settings | Air exhaust (vent) location | Ducting kit | Filter location | Overheat protection | Capacity (kg)  | Dimensions (W x H x D, cm) | Origin    | Warranty (years)* | Manufacturer / distributor | 7 Running costs (\$ / 10 years) | Price (\$)** |
| M,H                  | Front (L)                   | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 4.0            | 60 x 79 x 46               | Australia | 1                 | Electrolux                 | 743                             | 389          |
| C,M,H                | Rear                        | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 4.5            | 57 x 79 x 56               | NZ        | 2                 | Fisher & Paykel            | 982                             | 589          |
| M,H                  | Rear                        | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 4.5            | 57 x 79 x 56               | NZ        | 2                 | Fisher & Paykel            | 948                             | 485          |
| M,H                  | Front                       |             | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 3.5            | 57 x 79 x 44               | NZ        | 2                 | Fisher & Paykel            | 814                             | 409          |
| (F)                  | Rear (M)                    | (E)         | Front           | ns                  | 5.0            | 60 x 83 x 60               | Germany   | 2                 | Miele                      | 904                             | 1699         |
| M,H                  | Front (L)                   | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 5.0            | 60 x 79 x 50               | Australia | 1                 | Electrolux                 | 909                             | 479          |
| M,H                  | Front (L)                   | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 6.0            | 60 x 79 x 54               | Australia | 1                 | Electrolux                 | 1097                            | 569          |
| M,H                  | Front (L)                   | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 5.0            | 60 x 79 x 52               | Australia | 2                 | Electrolux                 | 909                             | 519          |
| (G)                  | Front (L)                   | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 5.0            | 60 x 79 x 52               | Australia | 2                 | Electrolux                 | 961                             | 569          |
| (G)                  | Front (L)                   | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (Q)               | 6.0            | 60 x 79 x 56               | Australia | 2                 | Electrolux                 | 1155                            | 639          |
| M,H                  | Front                       | (E)         | Front           | ✓ (R)               | 5.0            | 60 x 85 x 53               | UK        | 5                 | Kleenmaid                  | 1023                            | 1049         |
| M,H                  | Rear (N)                    | (D)         | Front           | ✓ (R)               | 5.0            | 60 x 85 x 53               | England   | 2                 | Robert Bosch               | 936                             | 899          |
| (H)                  | Rear                        | (E)         | Inside left     |                     | 8.0            | 69 x 105 x 71              | NZ        | 2                 | Fisher & Paykel            | 1467                            | 1499         |
| C,M,H (J)            | Rear (P)                    | (E)         | Front           | ✓                   | 9.0            | 69 x 108 x 72              | USA       | 5                 | Maytag                     | 1830                            | 1899         |
| C,M,H (K)            | Rear (P)                    | (E)         | Front           | ✓                   | 9.0            | 69 x 110 x 70              | USA       | 5                 | Maytag                     | 1809                            | 1599         |

# Newly assessed for this report.

\* This is the basic warranty; some manufacturers guarantee some parts for longer. Conditions may apply; check with the retailer.

\*\* Prices are recommended retail, provided by manufacturers in June 2006.

ns not stated

(A) Owing to energy label updating requirements of the dryer standard, there may be three differently rated ED56 models in shops: the two-star that we show here, and the same model relabelled as a one-star. There's also an upgraded version that's a two-star under the updated requirements, and it's more energy-efficient than the other two. We suggest you ask for this model — it can be identified by the 202 kWh for energy on the label.

(B) Owing to the energy label updating requirements of the dryer standard, you might also see this model in shops with a 1.5-star energy label (its older rating). The machine itself is unchanged.

(C) Single timer setting of one hour.

(D) Fittings supplied.

(E) Fittings optional at extra cost.

(F) 12 sensor options + two timer settings.

(G) Three temperature and three dryness levels.

(H) Variable plus auto, damp, dry and extra dry.

(I) Plus extra-low and five sensor settings.

(K) Plus delicate.

(L) Option of ducting from the rear.

(M) Option of ducting from the right or left side of the cabinet.

(N) Option of ducting through the front panel.

(P) Option of ducting from the left side of the cabinet.

(Q) Automatically resets.

(R) Resettable.

### 1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Ease of use: 20%
- Energy efficiency: 40%
- Drying time: 40%

### 2 Ease of use score

This assesses the ease of using the controls, and accessing and cleaning the filter.

### 3 Energy efficiency score

An assessment of how energy-efficient the dryers are at reaching a predetermined level of dryness, also taking into consideration the capacity of the machine.

We didn't test the energy efficiency of the dryers in the table. To get an energy rating label and be allowed on the Australian market, dryers not only have their energy efficiency measured

but have to achieve a certain level of drying performance.

Our score is calculated from information on the energy rating label. Our previous testing of many dryers' performance and energy use has shown the energy label to be accurate.

### 4 Drying time score/cycle time

The score is based on the time taken to dry 1 kg of clothes to a specific level of dryness. It's taken from the manufacturer's information.

The cycle time is the total time to dry a full load.

### 5 Energy rating stars

The star rating on the energy label is a measure of how energy-efficient the dryer is, and takes into account the capacity of the machine. The more stars the better, with a maximum of six, although at the time of publishing we're not aware of any dryer registered in Australia having more than 3.5 stars, and the highest rating in this table is two stars.

### 6 Features

See What to consider, page 44, for a discussion of most of these features.

■ **Reverse tumbling:** The drum reverses the direction of rotation at regular intervals to minimise tangling

while evenly drying your clothes.

■ **Internal drying rack:** This can be mounted inside some models and is useful for items that are best dried without tumbling (like woollens, delicates, shoes and hats).

■ **Temperature settings:**

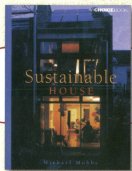
C — cold, M — medium, H — hot. Some auto-sensing dryers don't have manual temperature selection.

■ **Overheat protection:** When the temperature of the dryer goes over a preset limit, the power cuts off. This reduces the risk of fire caused by overheating. It's a good safety feature, but if it doesn't automatically reset or you can't reset it yourself, you'll need a service call if it trips.

### 7 Running costs

■ This is based on drying a full load about three times a week (150 loads a year) for 10 years. It's calculated based on an energy cost of 15 cents per kWh.

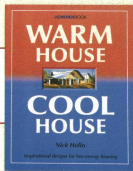
# choicebooks



## SUSTAINABLE HOUSE

How to create a sustainable and environmentally friendly house.

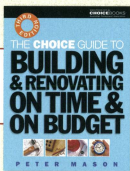
**\$33.75**



## WARM HOUSE COOL HOUSE

Inspirational designs for low-energy housing, with examples from all over Australia.

**\$33.75**



## THE CHOICE GUIDE TO BUILDING & RENOVATING ON TIME & ON BUDGET

3rd edition

A plain-language guide to directing building or renovating jobs.

**\$22.50**

Buy all 3 at the special price of \$80

**ALL CHOICE Books are cheaper here than normal retail**

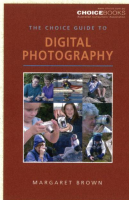


## THE CHOICE GUIDE TO BABY PRODUCTS

10th edition

Trustworthy and reliable buying information for your baby.

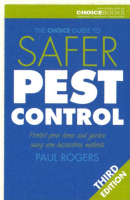
**\$20.65**



## THE CHOICE GUIDE TO DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Great advice on all aspects of going digital.

**\$29.25**

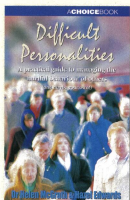


## THE CHOICE GUIDE TO SAFER PEST CONTROL

3rd edition

Protect your home from nasties using non-toxic methods.

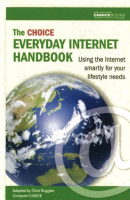
**\$22.50**



## DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES

Advice on dealing with the 'difficult' people in your life.

**\$18.00**

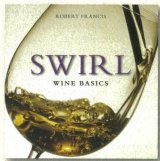


## THE CHOICE EVERYDAY INTERNET HANDBOOK

Learn how to use the internet effectively in your everyday life.

**\$27.00**

**Buy 3 or more books and postage is FREE**



## SWIRL: WINE BASICS

Tips on choosing, tasting, assessing and storing wine.

**\$19.95**

**See all our great titles at [www.choice.com.au/books](http://www.choice.com.au/books)**

### HOW TO ORDER:



Call 1800 069 552, 9-5, Mon-Fri, Sydney time, and quote CB/0608



Go to [www.choice.com.au/books](http://www.choice.com.au/books) (P & H \$6 for 1-2 books, free for 3 or more)

# recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: [www.recalls.gov.au](http://www.recalls.gov.au). If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on (02) 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

**LAUNDRY DETERGENT: PZ Cussons** has recalled **Duo laundry detergent**, no kg size, date code 6090 or 6093, sold in Mackay, Queensland.

**The problem:** It contains dishwasher detergent instead of laundry detergent. Due to the more harmful nature of dishwasher detergent, it should be packaged in childproof packaging with clear warnings and directions in case it's swallowed.

**What to do:** Don't use it. Remove it from the reach of children. Don't touch the powder. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

**FOOD: Pioneer Poultry** has recalled **Pioneer Poultry Whole Smoked Chicken**, various weights, vacuum-packed, with a use-by date of 08/06/06, and sold in NSW and ACT.

**The problem:** It may contain *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can cause illness or miscarriage in pregnant women, or illness in young children, the elderly or people with a low immune system.

**What to do:** Don't eat it. Check your freezer for any affected product. If you have concerns for your health, contact your GP. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for further information call (02) 9487 2022.

**FOOD: Tibaldi Smallgoods** has recalled **Tibaldi Loin Capocollo Mild**, various weights from 650 g to 1.3 kg, with a use-by date of 4/9/06, batch number 000005.

**The problem:** Testing has indicated the presence of salmonella. Salmonella poisoning can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain.

**What to do:** Don't eat it. Check your freezer for any affected product. Contact your GP if you have health concerns. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (03) 9354 9363 for more information.

**FOOD: Maisson** has recalled **Maisson Supreme, Maisson White, Maisson Rose and Maisson Lambrusco carbonated grape juice drink**, 750 ml glass bottles, all best-before dates up to and including 28/4/08.

**The problem:** The bottles may contain

yeast, which could cause the juice to ferment and discolour the cap or break the bottle.

**What to do:** Don't drink it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 282 311.

**FOOD: Minchinbury Fruit Market** has recalled **Freshhh Diptiron Buckwheat**, 500 g, packed on 16 Sept 05 with a use-by date of 12 12 06.

**The problem:** It actually contains crushed barley.

**What to do:** Don't eat it if you have an allergy or intolerance to barley. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (02) 9625 8021.

**FOOD: Aldi supermarkets** has recalled **Shoko Nussknusper Chocolate Hazelnut Crunch Biscuits**, all best-before dates up to and including 31.03.07, and sold in the ACT, NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

**The problem:** They contain egg protein, which isn't declared on the label.

**What to do:** Don't eat them if you have an allergy or intolerance to eggs. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

**BABY WALKER: Baby Dynamics** has recalled **Baby Dynamics 3 in 1 Baby Walker**.

**The problem:** It doesn't comply with product safety standards: it isn't labelled with the correct safety warnings.

**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase to have the correct labels applied. For further information call 0413 041 048.

**TOY: Hunter Overseas** has recalled **Magnetix Toy Building Sets**, sold through Kmart, Target, Myer, Coles, Big W, Toys R Us, Toy World and Toy Kingdom.

**The problem:** Small magnets may become dislodged from the Magnetix toy pieces, which may create a choking hazard for young children.

**What to do:** Remove them from the reach of young children. To obtain a refund or a replacement, email [enquiries@hunteroverseas.com.au](mailto:enquiries@hunteroverseas.com.au) or call 1800 224 094.

**TOY: Henkel Australia** has recalled **Pritt KidsArt Paintball Applicator**.

**The problem:** Leftover paint spoiling in the water paint applicator may result in pressure build-up when left for a period after use. This may cause the ball of the applicator to pop out of its mounting in the bottle.

**What to do:** Note the number on the bottom of the product, and call 1800 810 280 or return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

**FURNITURE: Freedom Australia** has recalled **Calvin black glass dining table**, sold at Freedom stores between 18 May 2005 and 5 May 2006. This recall has been extended from an earlier recall which applied to the Calvin frosted glass table.

**The problem:** Due to the design, moving the table may cause twisting and uneven stressing of the glass top, and under certain conditions it may break.

**What to do:** Contact Freedom to arrange to return it for a refund.

**THERAPEUTIC GOODS: Bausch & Lomb** has recalled **ReNu with MoistureLoc Contact Lens Solution**, all batches.

**The problem:** There may be a link between the product and a rare eye infection.

**What to do:** Don't use it. If you're concerned about having used this product, contact your eyecare practitioner. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or exchange, or call 1800 251 150 to arrange for an exchange.

**BABY CLOTHES: Coles Supermarkets and Pick 'n' Pay** have recalled **You'll Love Coles Baby Infants 2 Pack Terry Towelling Sleepsuits**. The pack contains one white sleepsuit and one coloured sleepsuit. The affected sleepsuits have long sleeves, long legs with feet and full front snap opening. The suits have the following APNs: 9300601263608 and 9300601264841 (boys' styles), and 9300601263646 and 900601264865 (girls). They were sold in Coles nationally and Pick 'n' Pay Supermarkets in Queensland from April 2006.

**The problem:** The snap buttons may easily break and come off, creating a possible choking hazard for young children.

**What to do:** Return them to your nearest Coles or Pick 'n' Pay store for a refund, or call 1800 061 562 for more information.

**BABY CLOTHES: Myer** has recalled **Angelina Ballerina and Kidsworld Girls' Nighties**, sold through Myer stores between January 2006 and May 2006. The Angelina Ballerina nighties came in two styles, with style numbers 34216, a pink nightie with wings under the arms, and 34146, a pink nightie with headband, both sold for \$24.95. The Kidsworld nighties also came in two styles, with style numbers LGW06011, a pink butterfly print nightie, and LGW06084, a nightie with a pink stripe with red embroidery, both sold for \$19.95. The style numbers can be found on the care label.

**The problem:** They've been incorrectly labelled as "Low Fire Danger" when they should be labelled "High Fire Danger".

**What to do:** Return them to your nearest Myer store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 811 611 between 9 am and 5 pm EST, Monday to Friday.

**RECHARGEABLE LANTERN: Ray's Outdoors** has recalled **Rechargeable Twin 60 cm Fluorescent Lantern**, product code 50064 (green box), sold between September 2005 and April 2006.

**The problem:** A fault may cause the product to catch fire.

**What to do:** Don't plug it in. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (03) 5278 7633.

**HAIR STRAIGHTENER: M & U Imports** has recalled **Turbo Ion Hair Straightener**, model DH-001, serial numbers between 10230 and 13320, sold from August 2004.

**The problem:** A fault could cause an electric shock to the user.

**What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to M & U Imports, Reply Paid 75023, 660A South Road, Moorabbin 3189, and a replacement will be sent to you, or for more information call (03) 9555 1533 or email [mui@muiimports.com.au](mailto:mui@muiimports.com.au).

## aboutchoice

The Australian Consumers' Association is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation, established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance their quality of life. It's a Council member of Consumers International.

**100% independent.** Our income is derived solely from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and products. All the products we subject to full testing are bought by us in the marketplace; sometimes to get the latest model we may buy directly from a manufacturer where we can select a random sample. We never accept gifts from manufacturers or retailers; we sometimes borrow samples, especially of new products, for quick reviews. We are not beholden to any commercial, government or union interests, and we don't accept advertising.

**We test and rate products and services.** Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a Best Buy. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted.

**Representing your interests.** We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote their rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

**'No commercial use' policy.** Our ratings and reports may not be used in advertising or for any other commercial purpose. ACA will take all steps to prevent commercial use of its materials, its name, and the name of CHOICE or its other publications and products. Please report any apparent violation to the Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, phone (02) 9577 3399; fax (02) 9577 3355; email [aussconsumer@choice.com.au](mailto:aussconsumer@choice.com.au).

**Permissions.** Reproduction of CHOICE, CHOICE Books and other CHOICE publications, in whole or in part, is forbidden without prior written permission (as is never permitted for commercial purposes). Address requests to CHOICE Consumer Services at the address below.

**Your privacy.** We're committed to protecting your privacy, and abide by Australia's National Privacy Principles. We never sell or give our mailing lists to other organisations. If you'd like to read our privacy policy, it's on our website or we can send you a copy.

**All literary and artistic works** and compilations of information are the property of Australian and International copyright © Australian Consumers' Association 2006. CHOICE™ is a trademark of the Australian Consumers' Association. All rights reserved.

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER:** Peter Kell. **Executive assistant:** Georgina Saitos.

**DEPUTY CEO:** Norm Crothers. **Office administrator:** Sylvia Bone.

**CHOICE Editor:** Jane Mackenzie. **Writers/journalists this issue:** Bridget Bader, Chris Barnes, Kate Browne, Rachel Clemons, Alan Dooley, Helen Kearney, Kim Laurie, Louise McCabe, Uta Mihm, David Oakenfull, Chris Ruggles, Georgina Swan, Niobe Syme.

**CONTENT GENERATION:** Chris Barnes, Rachel Clemons, Alan Dooley, Michael Hohl, Uta Mihm, Liz Munn, David Oakenfull, Martha Psiroukis, Chris Ruggles, Niobe Syme.

**CHOICE ONLINE:** Manager Linda Magee. **Chris Ruggles.** **Editor Robyn Ball.** **Rehman Khan,** **Glen Mason,** **Amira Meyer,** **Elizabeth Tournasatos.**

**MEDIA:** Indira Naidoo.

**RESEARCH AND TEST CENTRE:** Manager John Ashes. **Laboratory:** Manager Klaus Neuschel. **Jo Bektaş,** **Antonio Bonczur,** **Brian Champion,** **Geoff Day,** **Peter Horvath,** **Mohamed Jawahir,** **Fiona Mair,** **Scott O'Keefe,** **Neill Patterson,** **Benjamin Rossetto,** **Matthew Steen,** **Petr Valouch.** **Buying:** Dorothy Kneale, **Sonja Scodeller.** **Research:** Christine Shaday, **Joe Sydney.** **Test Research:** John Ashes.

**MARKETING AND COMMUNITY:** General Manager Mary Harris. **Community:** Research Rani Ellison, **Katherine Rock.** **Marketing:** Kellie Thomson, **Zac Godkin.**

**Consumer Services:** Manager Bill Stuart, **Caroline Davidson,** **David Hill,** **Silvana Ristovski,** **Alice Richards,** **Ann Prodromou.** **Manager:** Daniel Sly, **Art Director:** Michelle Hawesstein. **Senior designer:** Jacqui Fry. **Photographer:** Gene Ross.

**QUALITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES:** General Manager Barbara Manchester.

**Quality Assurance and Control:** Manager Pam Gardiner. **Assistant Manager:** Corinna Horigan. **Verifiers:** Ben Bridges, **Sharon Cauduro,** **Tracey Clancy,** **Frank Donaghy,** **Melanie Hunter,** **Lawson Lobb,** **Karen Palmer,** **Kellie Sharp,** **Melanie Stopic.**

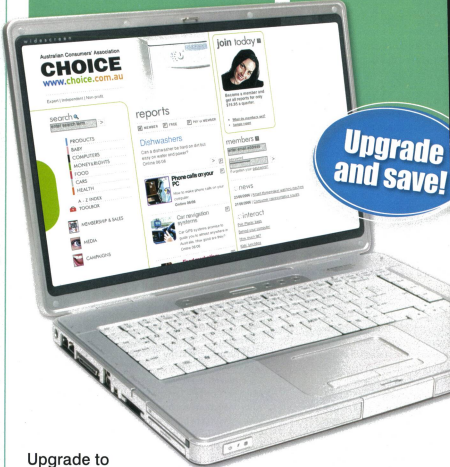
**POLICY AND CAMPAIGNS:** General manager Gordon Renouf. **Policy:** Nick Coates, **Care Hughes,** **Violetta Korczak,** **Alison So.** **Campaigns Co-ordinator:** Lizlie Ball.

**BUSINESS:** Chief Finance Officer Laila Green. **Accounts:** Jeannette Dwyer, **Kang Zhu Ge,** **Sera Raicana.** **Administration:** Jeannette Porter, **Gail Slavova.** **Records management:** Shirley Colless. **ICT:** Manager Stephen Macdonald. **Charles Ly.** **Subscriptions:** Manager Bill Stuart. **Supervisor:** Nootaya Hwang. **Co-ordinator:** Thelma Bracken. **Lyndie-Maree Morgan,** **Fiona Pollard,** **Phasathorn Wuttiaporn.**

**Marketing statistics** by GfK Marketing Services. **Financial information** supplied by Canam. **Services information** supplied by Standard & Poor's.

The Australian Consumers' Association is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. ACN 000 281 925. ABN 35 799 246 568. Registered office: 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, Australia.

## GET MORE FROM YOUR subscription



### Upgrade to

CHOICE Plus and get full access to [choice.com.au](http://choice.com.au)

— the perfect companion to your magazine.

Gain instant access to:

- Interactive compare-a-product tools
- Hundreds of product and service reports
- Easy-to-use interactive features
- Food and health quizzes
- Finance and investment calculators

Personal CHOICE magazine subscribers can gain full access to [choice.com.au](http://choice.com.au) for just \$10.50 per quarter (normally \$16.95).

**JOIN NOW!**

Go to

[www.choiceextra.com.au](http://www.choiceextra.com.au)

and follow the prompts



## index

## HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

\* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

**A**ir conditioners, split-system  
inverters **Oct**, Dec\*  
Airline lounge clubs **Jun**  
Animal testing for cosmetics **Apr**

**B**ackpacks for school **Dec**  
Bakeware, silicone **Aug**  
Balsamic vinegar **Nov**  
Barbecues, gas **Dec**, Jan/Feb\*  
Benchtop materials, kitchen **Aug**  
Bicycle helmets for children **Nov**  
Blenders, handheld **Apr**  
Body fat scales **Oct**  
Breathalysers **Dec**

**C**amcorders **Dec**  
Cameras  
digital **Oct**, **Apr**  
webcams **Mar**  
Carpet buying guide **Jul**  
Cars

ANCAP crash tests **Apr**, **Jul**  
GPS navigation systems **Jul**  
rear vision safety **Sep**  
security **Mar**  
tyres **Mar**, **May**\*  
used car safety **Nov**

Child/baby concerns  
backpacks for school **Dec**  
bicycle helmets **Nov**  
dummy safety **Jul**  
food promotions **Jun**  
high chairs **Oct**  
strollers, double **Aug**  
strollers, layback **May**, **Aug**\*

Cleaners, 'green' multipurpose **Apr**  
Clothes dryers **Aug**  
Coffee, espresso machines **Jan/Feb**  
Column heaters **Jun**  
Computers, laptop **Jun**  
Cordless phones **Jan/Feb**, **May**\*  
Corkscrews **Mar**  
Cosmetics, animal testing **Apr**  
Crackers and crispbread **Nov**

**D**etox kits **Oct**  
Digital camcorders **Dec**  
Digital cameras **Oct**, **Apr**  
Digital music **Apr**, **Jun**\*  
Dishwashers **Jan/Feb**, **Mar**\*, **Jul**  
Drugs, new vs old **Sep**  
Dryers, clothes **Aug**  
Dummy safety **Jul**  
DVD/hard disc recorders **May**, **Jun**\*, **Jul**\*  
DVD rentals, online **Oct**

**E**Bay **Sep**, **Jan/Feb**\*  
Eligible rollover funds **Aug**  
Energy drinks **Sep**  
Espresso machines **Jan/Feb**  
Exercise equipment, home **Sep**

**F**ast food, healthier **Mar**  
Fish, frozen **Jan/Feb**

**F**ood  
balsamic vinegar **Nov**  
crackers and crispbread **Nov**  
energy drinks **Sep**  
fast food, healthier **Mar**  
fish, frozen **Jan/Feb**  
food at sports venues **Aug**  
'fresh' fruit and vegetables **Aug**  
'healthfood' in supermarkets **May**  
hummus **Jan/Feb**  
meat pies **May**  
orange juice **Jun**  
pasta sauces **Jun**  
pesticides in fruit and veg **Apr**  
probiotics **Jul**  
promotions to kids **Jun**  
protein bars **Jul**  
salt **Apr**  
sugar **Sep**

Fridges  
mixed sizes **Nov**, **May**  
side-by-sides **Nov**  
Fruit, 'fresh' **Aug**  
Funerals **Oct**

**G**arden solar-powered lights **Aug**  
Gas barbecues **Dec**, **Jan/Feb**\*  
GPS car navigation systems **Jul**  
'Green' multipurpose cleaners **Apr**

**H**air shampoo **Jul**  
Health  
anti-snoring products **Apr**  
detox kits **Oct**  
drugs, new vs old **Sep**  
hearing aids **Jul**  
sleep aids **Sep**  
slimming products **Jan/Feb**  
sun safety **Nov**  
wheatgrass juice **May**  
'Healthfood' in supermarkets **May**  
Hearing aids **Jul**  
Heaters, column **Jun**  
High chairs **Oct**  
Home exercise equipment **Sep**  
Home theatre systems **Jan/Feb**  
Hummus **Jan/Feb**

**I**nsect repellents, personal **Dec**  
Insulation **May**  
Irons, steam **Jun**

**J**uicers **Oct**

**K**itchen benchtop materials **Aug**

**L**aptop computers **Jun**  
Lawnmowers, petrol **Nov**  
LCD TVs, 66 cm **Dec**  
LCD vs plasma TVs **Nov**

**M**eat pies **May**  
Media merging **Aug**

Microwave ovens **Jun**  
Mixers, benchtop **Dec**  
Mobile phones  
CDMA **Nov**  
GSM **Jun**  
Mobility scooters **Jan/Feb**  
Moisturisers with sunscreen **Sep**  
Money — see financial  
Mosquito repellents, personal **Dec**  
MP3 players **Apr**, **Jun**\*  
Music, digital **Apr**, **Jun**\*

**N**annies, finding one **May**  
Negative gearing **Jul**  
Notebook computers **Jun**

**O**nline DVD rentals **Oct**  
Orange juice **Jun**  
Ovens, microwave **Jun**

**P**ainkillers **Mar**  
Pasta sauces **Jun**  
Personal trainer, finding a good one **Apr**  
Personal video recorders (PVR)/set-top boxes **Jun**  
Pest managers, finding a good one **Oct**  
Pesticides in fruit and veg **Apr**  
Phones  
cordless **Jan/Feb**, **May**\*  
mobile — see Mobile phones  
smart **Nov**  
Pies, meat **May**  
Plasma TVs, 106 cm **Mar**  
Plasma vs LCD TVs **Nov**  
Printers, inkjet and laser, colour **Sep**  
Probiotics **Jul**  
Protein bars **Jul**

**R**ed wine **Dec**  
Refrigerators — see Fridges  
Rights when shopping **Dec**

**S**alt **Apr**  
Sandwich (panini) presses **May**, **Jul**\*

Scales, body fat **Oct**  
Scams **Jul**  
School backpacks **Dec**  
Scooters, mobility **Jan/Feb**  
Secateurs **Jun**  
Set-top boxes/PVR **Jun**  
Shampoo **Jul**  
Shopping rights **Dec**  
Silicone bakeware **Aug**  
Sleep aids **Sep**  
Slimming products **Jan/Feb**  
Smartphones **Nov**  
Smoke alarms **Jun**  
Snoring, anti-snoring products **Apr**  
Solar-powered garden lights **Aug**  
Solariums **Nov**

Strollers  
double layback **Aug**  
Sugar **May**, **Aug**\*  
Suitcases, wheeled **Sep**  
Sun safety **May**  
Super, eligible rollover funds **Nov**  
Supermarket brands **Aug**  
Mar

**T**anning salons **Nov**  
Telephones — see Phones  
Television  
LCD, 66 cm **Dec**  
LCD, 81 cm **Aug**  
LCD vs plasma TVs **Nov**  
plasma, 106 cm **Mar**  
set-top boxes/PVR **Jun**  
Termite inspections **Oct**  
Timers **Jan/Feb**  
Toasters, four-slice **Mar**  
Tyres **Mar**, **May**\*

**U**SB keys **Apr**

**V**acuum cleaners **Jan/Feb**  
Vegetables, 'fresh' **Aug**  
Video equipment  
camcorders **Dec**  
DVD/hard disc recorders **May**, **Jun**\*  
PVR/set-top boxes **Jun**  
Vinegar, balsamic **Nov**

**W**ashing machines **Sep**, **Mar**  
Web cameras **Mar**  
Wheatgrass juice **May**  
Wine, red **Dec**

## COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Australian Consumers' Association

is governed by an honorary council elected by the voting members. (For information about voting membership, call (02) 9577 3399.) Members of the council give their time without reimbursement, and are not engaged as principals in industry, advertising or sales.

**COUNCIL:** Chair: Jan McClelland. Deputy Chair: Jenni Mack. Members: Robin Brown, Cynthia Cliff, Chris Field, Dianne Hill, Phil Marchionni, Joan Staples, John T D Wood.

BEEN EVERYWHERE MAN..."

AVAILABLE IN SELECTED AREAS

Been everywhere?

Well, selected parts of everywhere, anyway...

PET FOOD ONLY



## Clumping Cat Litter

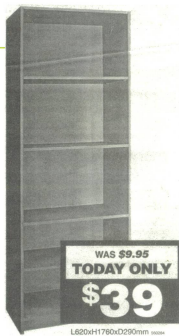
Locks in & controls odour

Not for the fussy kitty ...

### Rice – the new fruit!

It must be – because this “100% fruit bar” has rice flour listed as one of its ingredients.

INGREDIENTS: APRICOT (CONTAINS RICE FLOUR, PRESERVATIVE (2201) (99%), PEAR JUICE, FRUIT FIBRE, CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF PEANUTS, OTHER NUTS, SESAME SEEDS AND OTHER SEEDS. REAL FRUIT MAY HAVE OCCASIONAL PIT PIECES. EQUIVALENT TO 3 PIECES OF WHOLE FRESH FRUIT. 100% FRUIT INGREDIENTS. MADE IN AUSTRALIA FROM LOCAL AND REPORTED INGREDIENTS.



WAS \$9.95  
TODAY ONLY  
**\$39**

L620xH1780xD290mm

**TODAY'S SPECIAL?**

Makes you wish you bought it yesterday ...



Detox your home and clean without chemicals



YELLOW FOR WOOD SURFACES, MIRRORS, STEREO EQUIPMENT  
— 400 GSM\*

DARK BLUE FOR GREASE AND CRIME IN THE BATHROOM AND KITCHEN  
— 580 GSM\*

PINK FOR TV AND COMPUTER SCREENS  
— 190 GSM\*

LIGHT BLUE FOR WINDOWS AND MIRRORS  
— 300 GSM\*

MILLIONS OF TINY FIBRES ABSORB EVERYTHING. SWEEPS UP DIRT, DUST, FINGERPRINTS!

new

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY — CLEANS EVERYTHING WITHOUT USING DETERGENTS OR NASTY CHEMICALS

**NEW Microfibre Cleaning Cloths**  
Use these cloths and you don't need to use chemicals when cleaning, saving you money and helping rid your environment of toxins that are absorbed through the lungs and skin. There are four different cloths for four different jobs — so you don't clean the bathroom with your garden cloth! They leave your microfibre cleaning cloths in the dust, because of their high tech miracle microfibre action. The secret is electrostatic attraction which draws dust and grease out like a magnet. Dark Blue for the bathroom and kitchen, Light Blue for windows, Pink for TV and monitor screens, Yellow for wood surfaces, mirrors. Each 36 cm x 36 cm. (463371)

**\$12.99** set of 4

GSM means grams per square metre referring to cloth's thickness.

A colour code conundrum that could have been written by Dan Brown ...

These four different cleaning cloths are colour-coded, "...so you won't clean the bathroom with the kitchen cloth." But hold on... the dark blue one is for both the bathroom and the kitchen. Baffling ...



**BEFORE**  
Lashes look thin, broken, sparse



**AFTER**  
Lashes look full and healthier

**Well spotted!**

11-year-old Eliza Chapman spotted that these 'before' and 'after' shots show absolutely no difference at all.

### HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry ('pet food only' cat litter) goes to A Cartwright. Thanks also to G Beech, P Betts, E Chapman, M Hamilton and R Jamieson for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.